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BY BURKE BRENTFORD.

THE SEA SCOUT;

Or, THE PATRIOT PRIVATEER.



"HURRAH!" CRIED SKIPPER BEN, CROSSING SWORDS WITH ONE OF THE MIDDIES.

The Sea Scout;
OR,
THE PATRIOT PRIVATEER.
BY BURKE BRENTFORD.

CHAPTER I.
AMONG THE MISTS.

"Ship ahoy! what craft is that?"
The challenge was hoarsely bellowed from the towering stern of a British war-vessel, the corvette Champion, one of the numerous bulldogs of the sea that were infesting and blockading New York Harbor in the autumn of the year 1780.

It was directed through the thick early morning mists that shrouded everything in a milky haze toward a smaller vessel that was gradually looming up phantom-like from the direction of the Kill von Kull, or Staten Island Kills, as the connecting strait between the upper bay and Raritan Bay is now chiefly denominated.

As no answer was returned on the instant, the challenge was repeated, louder and more insolently than before.

"Oh, blow it mild, Mr. Cocked-Hat-and-Gold-Lace!" was at last hazily drawled out in answer from somewhere out in the fog. "This ship's the Mercy Lord, provision-sloop, of Perth Amboy, Benjamin Harrup, otherwise Barnacle Ben, commanding. Jest as if you didn't or oughtn't to know it, without raspin' your gullet in that way with tryin' to make a fog-horn of it!"

"None of your cursed rebel guff, you lubber!" was the final summons roared from the Britisher. "Heave to under our stern-post here, and show your papers aboard, or it may be the worse for you!"

The craft was duly brought under the warship's stern in obedience to the order, while the skipper, a tall, rather awkward-appearing young man in homespun, with a broad, somewhat vacant-looking face, and a general air of free-and-easy indifference, could be hazily descried leaning nonchalantly back against the tiller.

There were two officers on the poop-deck of the corvette, one a passed midshipman, acting as sailing-master, from whom the summons to the sloop had proceeded, the other the second lieutenant, an older and better-tempered officer, and both in all the glory of bright uniforms bedizened with gold lace.

"It's only that blasted New Jersey idiot, Barnacle Ben!" said the elder officer of the corvette, somewhat testily. "His papers will doubtless pass muster in short order, and when you are relieved you are welcome to a glass of grog with me in my cabin, Mr. Manners."

"Thank'e, Mr. Cropsey; I'll join you with pleasure."

And the lieutenant forthwith disappeared down the companionway.

Though the other's inferior in rank, the midshipman was a nephew of Lord Howe, the admiral of the entire fleet, in the direct line of swift promotion by preferment, which then, no less than now, went for quite as much as merit in the British naval service.

"Let go the jib-sheet!" was at this moment nasally yelled from the sloop.

At the same time she was yawed to squarely under the corvette's stern gun.

A moment later Barnacle Ben leisurely climbed over the poop-ladder.

Mr. Manners critically examined the young man's papers, and handed them back with the remark that they were correct.

"Thanks, my Lord!" and Ben turned to take his departure. "But I could have told you that much without coming on board."

"Wait, my man!" The midshipman's hand was upon his shoulder in a not unkindly fashion. "Come aft behind the binnacle here. Of course I knew you, my seeming harshness being only put on for effect. I want to speak with you."

The youth obeyed, meanwhile throwing a covert glance of shrewd comprehension around upon the superbly-kept decks and splendidly-burnished guns.

"I say, my man," continued the midshipman, with a knowing twinkle of the eye, "your provisions are consigned to old John Lord, as usual, I suppose, eh?"

"Slap-bang you've hit it, Mr. Manners, plunk in the bull's-eye!"

"Can you keep a secret?"

"Kin a fish swim, or a purty gal paint her face to look purtier?"

"I'll give you a crown to take a letter from me to Mistress Mercy Lord, after

whom your sloop is named, and at the same time to keep mum about it."

Ben's wide mouth fell open, and his eyes seemed to fairly bulge out of his head with eagerness.

"What! a—a hull crown-piece?" he gasped; "and jest for carrying of a letter?"

The officer laughed at his simplicity, real or apparent, and both money and letter were at once passed into the youth's possession.

"Wait a minute, Barnacle," he continued, as the other was again turning away, with a clutch upon the pocket in which he had hurriedly stowed away the coin as if holding a small fortune in his grasp. "A word or two more with you, if you are in no great haste?"

"Goshtalmighty, holy hemlock! as many as you please at the same price, Mr. Toggs-and-Epaulettes."

"You must see a good deal of the young lady in the course of your frequent visits to the old gentleman's store-house, eh, Barnacle?"

"Oh, yes," was the rather doubtfully-drawled reply, "in a small way, you know, Mr. Manners, as befits our difference of station."

"Yes, yes; that goes without saying. But, look you, Barnacle, is there any other fleet officer than myself that is making his respects to Miss Mercy, do you think?"

Ben looked preternaturally confidential, and took off his greasy tarpaulin in order to scratch his head to better advantage.

"There's only Captain Scudder, of the Belerophon, to my actoal knowledge," he replied, circumspectly.

Manners's brow darkened. He was a swarthy handsome, aristocratic-looking young man, of four or five-and-twenty, but with a sinister expression indicative of passions little subject to self-government, and not otherwise agreeable.

"Look you, Barnacle," he went on, "the Lords are your friends, as I take it?"

"First and last, every day in the week, plump up to the handle, and straight-away!" enthusiastically.

"Convey a warning whisper to John Lord then, as if on your own account."

"A warnin'? Lord-a-mercy! a real warnin', Mr. Manners?"

"Yes; tell him that Captain Scudder means no good to either his sweet daughter or himself. Though my own first-cousin, once removed, on my mother's side, as Scudder is, fair dealing prompts me to suggest this warning. He can't have any real hope of marrying Mistress Mercy, and, besides, I am satisfied he suspects the old gentleman of being in secret communication with General Washington. There you are. You'll give it to him strong, won't you?"

"Won't I, though?" already making for the ladder. "Gosh-all-hemlock! Mr. Lord suspected of such horribleness?"

"And you won't forget the letter?"

"Gaff me for a catfish, if I do! Jeewhillikens, bullheads and beeswax! Suspected of communicatin' with General Washington? Oh, Lord!"

Upon regaining the deck of his sloop, however, a change came over the seeming simpleton, much like that of a court jester or a clown, who might suddenly discard his grotesque livery and step out of it a man, keen, active, daring and alert.

"Head away!" he shouted.

And as the Mercy Lord cut away from under the corvette's stern, the mists began to lift and clear away.

CHAPTER II.

OUT OF THE FOG.

"COME aft here, my hearties!" called out the young skipper, as soon as the sloop was well away up along the mouth of the Hudson amid the driving fog-wreaths and with no other craft in the immediate vicinity.

The crew of the Mercy Lord, including two stalwart Yankee sailors and an exceedingly wide-awake cabin-boy of fifteen or sixteen, straightway gathered around their chief.

"Coast's clear!" said Skipper Ben, peremptorily. "You, Silas Martin, show up first."

The elder of the two sailors thus addressed quietly turned up the bottom of one of his trowsers-legs, ripped a close-folded document out of its hem with his jack-knife, and handed it without a word to the young man, who as quietly folded it after a brief external examination.

"You next, Thomas Simmons!"

The other sailor forthwith produced an enormous plug of tobacco, of the variety known as niggerhead, tore the two broad layers of it deftly apart, to the revelation of a small flat-folded paper somewhat similar in appearance to its predecessor, which was likewise matter-of-factly appropriated by Barnacle Ben.

"Show up, Frank! Your turn."

The cabin-boy smilingly drew the short butcher-knife from its leather pouch at his belt. A rap on the rail caused its buck-horn handle to fly open at one side, to the disclosure of yet another folded paper, which also passed into the young skipper's possession.

"Good!" said the latter, half to himself. "I

think our worthy owner, Mr. Lord, ought to be satisfied with his secret correspondence this time.

"Tom Simmons, take the tiller! Loosen out the flying-jib, you two, and wear away! This tide should take us in head-on to the store house wharf inside half an hour with a merry dip under the Bellerophon's figurehead; and to the foul fiends with the red cross of St. George on the battle-flag at her gaff!"

While these orders were being carried out with a cheery promptitude indicative of true heartiness in the work, Barnacle Ben seated himself on the capstan head, just forward of the tough mast and its enormously bellying-out, though considerably patched-up leg-of-mutton sail, and folding his arms, permitted his bold, keen glance to roam out listlessly through the rapidly-lifting fog.

"How long, oh, Lord, how long?" he muttered, between his clinched teeth. "Oh, for a ship of my own, on which to carry our patriot flag like a meteor of destruction amid the war and merchant marine of King George!"

Then, as so often before, the wish of his heart died away in something like a hopeless sigh.

The widowed mother and unsophisticated sister in Perth Amboy, whose care and support had thus far kept him out of the active service of his country, notwithstanding his robust and intelligent man's estate, with the bold sailor's blood of adventurous ancestry and not a little personal experience on blue water coursing so hotly and impatiently in his youthful veins, rose once more before his mind's eye with their accustomed tender yet somewhat disheartening effect.

Then another image, that of Mercy Lord, the sloop-owner's beautiful daughter, came rushing into his mind.

He rose and stamped his foot, a look of mingled shame and resolution—of furious impatience with the obligations that had fettered his natural inclinations from the very beginning of the War for Independence—leaping into his frank, fearless face.

"I will be free!" he exclaimed. "What! to continue to drag out existence here as a mere sloop-skipper, or, at best, as a cheap harbor spy and water scout in the service of my country? Never! Old Lord shall help me to a privateer, or I'll cut one out on my own account, sink or swim, dance or hang, and may the Old Boy pipe for his own!"

Then his eye flashed covetously and with a glad, springing light.

The fog was so far dissipated that the corvette, now half a mile away on the weather-bow, stood in perfect and beautiful outline against the dancing blue of the water and the clear azure of the morning sky—a vision of symmetry and grace to make a sailor's pulses leap!

Of the full sloop-of-war complement, twenty guns, she was surprisingly low and sharp cut in the hull for a war-ship of that day, besides being rakishly studded and bark-rigged, another praiseworthy innovation upon the rather clumsy naval architecture then in vogue.

Moreover, she was thoroughly American-built throughout, having been contracted for by a prominent Boston shipbuilder just prior to the outbreak of hostilities with the mother country, and reckoned everywhere as the crack sailer and sea-boat of the entire seaboard.

"Jupiter!" muttered Ben, "what wouldn't I give to fly the Stars and Stripes, the flag of our new and our free nation from her soaring main-peak?"

"Ye may well say that, Master Benjamin Harrup," said a voice at his elbow, and then his mate and eldest assistant, grizzled old Silas Martin, was at his side, with his eyes also fixed upon the enlivening spectacle. "And, if you've the heart for it, why not?"

Here the corvette's rigging was suddenly a-swarm with tars, her anchor was up, her wealth of canvas shook out as if by magic, and she was gliding off on a starboard tack in the direction of the Kills like a thing of life.

Drawing a long breath, the young skipper had turned to his veteran companion with an inquiring glance.

"There she skims, a sea-hawk of the waves," continued Silas, reflectively turning the quid in his cheek, "and straight for Perth Amboy, your native place, where her officers are to have a sort of picnic with the pretty girls—American girls, too, mind you!" half-indignantly—"which will, like enough, leave the ship under less than half-guard by moonrise. And again I say, Master Benjamin, what I've danced on my knee many a time when you was a kid, with your stout father, Hiram Harrup, still this side of Davy Jones's Locker," and once more the old eyes sought the younger ones with a suggestive stare, "if you've the heart for it, man, why not?"

"Don't be so plagued oracular, Silas!" interposed Ben, impatiently. "Do you mean that it might be possible to cut out the corvette, to make a privateer of her?"

"Humph!" and Silas turned carelessly away.

"Give the idee to old Johnny Lord for what it's worth. His heart's in the right place, if he does play a little fast and loose with the accursed red-coats in the town yonder."

Then the faces of both men darkened, as the sloop, in heading for her warehouse dock, now not far away, swept close under the quarter of a great frigate swinging lazily to anchor with the up-rush of the tide, a brave figurehead of mythological purport on her prow, the name Bellerophon in huge red-and-gilt letters on her stern.

"He makes his home in her!" growled Martin, his horny hands clinching instinctively. "Traitor of traitors! if we could only lay secret hooks on him!"

Barnacle Ben essayed no immediate reply, though his eyes flashed balefully from under his frowning brows.

The hated personage alluded to was none other than Benedict Arnold, then fresh from the baffled West Point treasonable attempt which has made his name the by-word for infamy in American history, and at this time having his quarters on the British man-of-war mentioned.

Suddenly Ben touched his companion's arm.

"A suggestion, comrade!" he whispered.

"What is it?"

"They do say that the traitor often takes his stroll on the lawns back of St. Paul's and along King's Farms-ways when the nights are fine!"

Martin slowly blinked his left eye and drew down the corners of his mouth, as he nodded sagaciously.

"A brave thought, my lad!" he replied. "Sound old Lord on that, too."

The sloop was now rapidly approaching the wharf leading up to the old merchant's storehouse and residence, which were prettily situated at the foot of what is now Rector street, and but a short distance below the green and shaded knoll sloping down toward the river from old St. Paul's, with a glimpse of the bowering stretch of King's Farms to the north.

The old merchant was already awaiting them on the pier.

"Tumble off your cargo as fast as you can, you fellows!" he said, somewhat anxiously, while grasping the young skipper by the hand. "And you, Ben," in a lower voice, "if you have secret dispatches, come with me in haste. Look behind you!"

Ben did so, to perceive the gig of the Bellerophon making rapidly for the dock, with the commanding uniformed figure of Captain Scudder in the stern sheets.

"I believe you that there's reason enough for it, Mr. Lord," he muttered, hurrying after the merchant up into the dingy little storehouse office.

CHAPTER III.

FIGURES MORE DISTINCTLY OUTLINED.

WHEN the British naval captain abruptly entered the merchant's office, five minutes later, with a suspicious frown, there seemed nothing in the world to justify his unseemly action.

Mr. Lord looked up a little indignantly from the desk at which he was examining the Mercy Lord's invoices.

Barnacle Ben—once more the wide-eyed, gaping simpleton in appearance—surveyed the newcomer's brilliant uniform with the pleased admiration of a child.

The three secret dispatches, from American army officers scouting through the pine lands back of Perth Amboy and elsewhere in New Jersey, having been duly delivered and read, were nothing more than a heap of flaky ashes on the old-fashioned office-hearth.

"Lord, you have been burning some papers!" exclaimed Scudder, with a disappointed scowl. "What were they?"

"Bad bills against bankrupt debtors—perhaps," replied the merchant, testily. "There are others unburnt on hand, Captain Scudder—with a good British significance in every preserved item—if you would like to liquidate them."

The officer flung himself into an arm-chair, with a dissatisfied laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha!" boisterously roared the young sloop-man, fairly rolling on his seat with explosive mirth. "One Britisher liquidating another Britisher's bad debts! Ho, ho, ho! The idee! Haw, haw, haw!"

He then slipped out of the office just in time to avoid a furious stroke which the officer aimed at him with the flat of his sword.

Then the young man lost no further time in seeking out pretty Mistress Mercy Lord, that he might place Midshipman Manners's letter before a possible search on the part of the irate Scudder might cause him to betray his trust.

It had been wash-day on the preceding day, and he accordingly found the young lady at her kitchen ironing, assisted by Aunt Susan, the negro maid-of-all-work.

Mercy was just turned nineteen, and as pretty a girl as was to be found in the New York of that primitive period—which is saying a good deal.

She accorded a sly greeting to the young man from the depths of her laughing dark eyes, dismissed Aunt Susan with a gesture, and then read the midshipman's letter that was handed her—at first with an indifferent, half-contemptuous air, then with a burst of charming laugh-

ter, after which she incontinently tossed the missive into the fire.

"What a silly goose of a young man!" she exclaimed, rolling the sleeves yet higher above the elbows of her plump arms as she went on with her ironing. "And, how is it with thee this last trip, Benjamin? Thou didst leave thy good mother and sweet sister in their accustomed good health at Amboy, I trust?"

Barnacle Ben, who had forthwith resumed the manlier air that was natural to him upon coming into the young woman's presence, answered her inquiries dutifully, but also with an ill-suppressed impatience, after which he said, very gravely:

"I hope that you do not really care for the young gentleman, Mercy?"

"Do you refer to the young gentleman who now propounds the question to me, Benjamin?" she asked, demurely.

"You must know that I do not, Mercy!" with added seriousness.

"Ah, to be sure!" good-naturedly. "But to the English midshipman, Mr. Manners. Eh, Benjamin?"

"To whom else should I refer?"

"Well, why not to Captain Scudder, who wants to take me to his sister, the duchess of something in England, that I may become a lady of the land, and, perhaps, even a good enough one to become his second wife, and he these twenty years a widower, with two daughters older than myself?" And she burst into her fresh laugh that was like a peal of bells. "Whereas, Mr. Manners would merely beseech me to marry him forthwith, on his double expectations that his relative, Lord Howe, will promote him to a post-captaincy before the year is out, while, in a more social way, the successive deaths of seven or eight intervening heirs, will assuredly land him into an earldom."

The young man compressed his lips angrily.

"So then," he exclaimed, with much bitterness, "are such the propositions that are made to you by these British aristocrats, Mercy?"

"Even so, Benjamin," indifferently, and with her face bent low over the ironing-board, "and perhaps with more to spare. Who knows?"

"That is just it—who knows or can know, with your bewitching beauty and grace in the balance, wherewith to outweigh all men's brains and sober senses!" discontentedly.

And he began to pace the floor with angry strides.

"But can I help it, Benjamin?" looking up with a mock air of concern.

"Perhaps not—I suppose not—who said you could? But you haven't answered my first question yet."

"How stupid I am, with no more memory than a chippy-bird! What was it, Benjamin?"

"Well, I'll amplify it now. Do you care for either of these gentlemen, or their brilliant offers, Mercy?"

"Benjamin Harrup!" in a new and tenderly-protesting voice, which caused him to look eagerly toward her.

"Well, Mercy?"

"Such a question from *you*!" with softly-swimming eyes from which the last lingering spark of bantering coquetry was fled.

The next instant he was around the ironing-board, and she was in his arms.

"You to ask me such a question," Mercy pouted, "when—when it is less than a year since you told me that you loved me, and—and I let you kiss me for an answer! Oh, Ben!"

He was now greedily availing himself of the opportunity to kiss her over and over again, when the tender episode was interrupted by the sound of voices in conversation which were rapidly growing nearer.

A moment later, just as the kitchen door opened, and Mr. Lord entered, followed by Captain Scudder, Mercy was once more busily at work over the ironing-board, while Barnacle Ben, with a clever resumption of his simpleton aspect, was busily engaged in scraping a residue of bees-wax off the bottom of one of the cooler flat-irons in an obscure corner with his jack-knife.

"My daughter," said the old merchant, "Captain Scudder insisted on coming with me right in here to thee, in spite of my protesting that you were at your house-work, and in no sort of mood for the reception of visitors."

Unabashed by the captain's serious air, or by the glittering bravery of his full uniform, Mercy looked over to him with hard eyes and a little red spot, like a danger-signal, in either cheek.

"Then I don't thank Captain Scudder for his bad manners, father; that is all!" she said, indignantly. "Or, if he likes kitchen society for a steady thing, I shall take pleasure in summoning our slave-woman, Susan, to do the entertaining of him."

But the Britisher only slightly flushed, and then advanced a step.

"Let the earnestness of my object intercede for me, I beg of you, fair Mistress Lord," he said, rather winningly.

"What would you wish to say to me, sir?" asked the young beauty, with no abatement of her asperity.

"I may be ordered back to England at almost

any day, dear lady, and would humbly beg to know if you have fully considered the honorable proposition I had the honor to make to you, through your good father?"

Mercy placed her knuckles on the ironing-board, and, with her beautiful arms akimbo, gazed at the officer squarely and critically across the barrier.

"Yes, Captain Scudder, I have fully considered your honorable and munificent proposition," she answered.

The captain's fears took the alarm at once, as they had never done in the numerous desperate sea-fights of his career, for he was a thorough sailor and a brave man.

"Sir," said he, turning with just a suggestion of menace, or intimidation, in his manner toward the merchant, "I trust that you did not neglect to present to Mistress Mercy the advantages of my offer to her in their best aspects."

"I failed in nothing in pleading your case, Captain Scudder," returned Mr. Lord, deferentially. "In fact, she will doubtless bear me out in saying that I advised her to accept your professed beneficence in every particular and without delay."

"It is true, sir," reinforced Miss Mercy, with treacherous sweetness. "He did just that. Said that, as I was motherless and the air was so troubous hereabouts, your noble sister, the duchess's, protection would doubtless be the making of my fortune, to say nothing of whatever other and future honor you might have in store for me out of your princely magnanimity."

The captain clasped his hands.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, ecstatically, "and you appreciate the brilliancy of my proposition, then, fair mistress?"

"I do, sir; to the full," still sweetly.

"Your answer? your answer?"

"That I will none of it!" with a decisive smash of the flat-iron upon its metal stand. "No, sir; once for all, now and forever, and not if you were the Prince of Wales himself, with a prospective crown and throne to bait me with!"

The Britisher was aghast.

"Wh-h-hy?" was all he could gasp.

"Because I do not care for you," and Mercy unconcernedly proceeded with her interrupted work.

CHAPTER IV.

BARNACLE BEN'S DIPLOMACY.

THE discomfited Britisher cast a furious glance at Mercy's father, and then, in beating an ignominious and very red-faced retreat out of the kitchen domain, made a significant sign to the gaping Barnacle Ben, who controlled his merriment sufficiently to follow him forth with a servile and wondering air.

Captain Scudder led the way among the trees of the adjoining town green, where, having somewhat regained his composure, he turned to his humble-seeming companion with an air of mingled condescension and affability.

"My young friend," he said, "I give you the credit of being not quite the idiotic ass that you appear."

"Oh, sir, you do me too much honor!" stammered the young man, with a gratified grin. "But then," bridling up self-importantly, "there be those that do say I have a pretty wit of my own."

"Ah, perhaps so. Am I right in surmising that, in addition to your sloop-employment, you have considerable intimacy in this old merchant's household? Speak right out, and without scratching your head. I am not going to hurt you, but, on the contrary, if you should prove useful to me, I may put a stray guinea in your way occasionally."

Ben had only hesitated in his response through secret surprise at perceiving Mr. Midshipman Manners, whom he had thought to be far away up the Kill von Kull in the corvette by this time, slip out of sight behind a huge elm-tree not far away.

He now fairly jumped off the ground, his eyes seeming to pop out of his head, and his entire manner indicating astonishment.

"A guinea?" he exclaimed, in a sort of hushed yell. "A real, shinin', golden guinea?"

The captain nodded urbanely.

"I'm thicker in old Lord's house than flies in a molasses jug!" exclaimed the youth, glibly. "What do you want to know, sir? I'm your man! Miss Mercy never makes no account of me before anybody. I'm a sort of tame cat in the establishment. A guinea? Whack out jest one, to show you're not deludin' a poor innocent boy like me," extending his palm, with his mouth watering, "and I'll rip the roof clean off the house for you! That's me. Oh, yes; I've a purty wit of my own, captain, if I do say it as hadn't orter."

The officer produced a new guinea piece, filigree it in his hand till it flashed in the sunshine royally.

"Answer my questions truly," said he, "and this coin shall be yours."

"Fire away! Rumtumtididdle! I'm your man, I am!"

"I suspect that my ill-success with the fair

Mistress Mercy is due to my having a younger and perhaps handsomer rival in the field."

"Wal, now, sir, I don't know about that. Besides yourself, there's only that young chap of a midshipman from the Champion, who, notwithstandingin' that he's got a taking way and a roguish eye of his own—"

Captain Scudder interrupted him with a muttered curse.

"My relative, young Manners—just as I feared!" he exclaimed, half-under his breath. "Curses!"

"Gosh all hemlock!" cried the seeming simpleton; "your relative, captain? that dandified, sweet-spoken chip of a gun-room table, whatseems so taken with betimes—that is, when you're not on hand yourself—or I mean to say—"

"Peace, fool! See; here is your guinea. You shall have another if you serve me fairly. What, then! does young Manners hang around hereabouts to steal a word with the young mistress occasionally?"

"Ay, sir, that he do!" pocketing the coin with an insane chuckle.

"In the evening chiefly?"

"Not a mile t'other side of dusk, I fancy."

"Still, he can scarcely be sparkling this evening, since the corvette is gone down into the narrow Kills to be gone Jerseywards for several days."

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"Why do you guffaw, idiot?"

"Oh, the idee of the dandy sailing-master not finding a furlough, even from a corvette's picnicking, when there's a chance of his sparkling Mistress Mercy Lord! It's rich!"

"What! you think he'll be on hand hereabouts this evening, then?"

"Captain, I'm jest dead sure of it, though I dare not tell you why I am."

"Good!" muttered Scudder, communing with himself, but audibly enough for the sharp-eyed youth to catch the words. "While we leave General Arnold to take the air with his escort along the King's Farms shore up yonder, what better opportunity than for me to interrupt a lover's interview hereaway? Hark ye, mylad," more loudly, "if you can bring me to interrupting young Manners's game this evening, it shall be two more guineas in your grip."

"Two?"

"You have a gentleman's word, churl!"

"Good enough, my lord! You shall find the young blade airing his heels at this very spot, an hour after dusk this evening, or I'm a bigger fool than I look!"

"I shall trust thee. Remember the reward," and with that the captain hurried away to his gig in waiting.

Barnacle Ben remained loitering where he had been left, with his hands in his pockets, until he was joined by the sailing-master, as he was sure he would be.

"Hist, there, Barnacle!" was the latter's greeting.

"Why, Mr. Manners!" exclaimed the young man, in pretended astonishment. "And I supposed you were up and away in the Kills with the corvette."

"Stow that, you lubber! What was that superannuated coxcomb, Scudder, conspiring with you about a few minutes ago?"

"Ahal that's a secret, Mr. Manners. He wanted me to tell him when the young mistress intends to keep tryst here with you, but I would not. I may be simple, but I am incorruptible, sir."

"What!" cried the sailing-master, delightedly; "you gave her my missive, then?"

"That I did, sir."

"And she will meet me here at dusk this evening, as I beseeched her?"

"Oh! but how should I know?"

"Nonsense! how did the lovely maiden receive my screed?"

"Wreathing with smiles like a mill-pond's under a ruffling breeze. In fact, I never saw her so jolly and good-humored over anything."

"Enough, you rogue! You have earned your crown-piece fairly, and here is another for you. The young mistress can depend upon her Manners, if not upon the customs of the day."

And away danced the midshipman, in even better humor than his superior officer.

"The traitor, Arnold, to walk with his escort on the King's Farm shore this eve," soliloquized Barnacle Ben, when left alone, "while the two Britishers will doubtless come to a duel on this spot! Come, now, if a good stroke is not to be made out of this complication, it will be because I do not know an opportunity when I see it."

He hastened back to Mistress Mercy, acquainting her with the state of the case and begging her to be merely careful about keeping within doors for the remainder of the day and the ensuing evening.

"I shall do as you wish in this affair, my dear Benjamin," said the young girl, seriously. "But it will grieve me greatly if the foolish gentlemen should come to murderous blows on the score of a simple girl such as I, who cares not a row of hooks-and-eyes for either of them."

"Be not alarmed, my darling," returned her lover. "A little blood-letting will do no harm,

should they fall to pinking one another. And besides, think how it will facilitate my scheme for kidnapping the arch-traitor, if I can only summon enough daring spirits to my aid from among the Sons of Liberty, with your father's privilege for using the provision-sloop in the same service!"

"Heaven prosper such a cause, at least!" said Mercy, fervently. "But, this reminds me that my father is desirous of conferring with us both in private, and without delay."

The young man drew back, with a troubled face.

"Well, let us have it out, then," he said, a little doggedly, after a pause. "Even if he suspect our secret, and is intending to forbid me the house and his employment henceforth for daring to love you, Mercy, it will be something better than a continued suspense."

"Nay, but, Benjamin," and the beautiful girl smiled somewhat hopefully, "let us not borrow trouble that may not be in store for us. My father seemed to me to be mostly troubled by reason of certain suspicions which the red-coat authorities seem to entertain of him. At all events, he did not appear in any brooding ill-humor with thee, my dearest. But let us go to him."

They did so accordingly, finding the old merchant impatiently awaiting them in his store-house office, and with such intentions as were to constitute an unexpected surprise for both youth and maid.

CHAPTER V.

THE OLD MERCHANT'S SECRET.

"SIT you down, my dear children," said Mr. Lord, with grave kindness. "There is that of much importance which I would communicate to you."

In spite of his Anglo-Saxon surname, Mr. Lord (now well along in years, for he had married late in life, the beautiful Mercy being his only child) was almost wholly of Dutch ancestry on both sides. To a sturdy thick-set figure, as yet but little bowed by age, was conjoined a face expressive of benevolence and meekness, associated with much quiet resoluteness as the keynote of his character; and his speech and demeanor were distinguished by a quaint unobtrusiveness of address, which at the same time could be uncompromisingly stern and unyielding on occasion.

When the young people had duly seated themselves in the dingy little office partitioned off from the first floor of the store-house, and overlooking the pleasant river beyond the connecting dock, the old merchant touched a small bell at his elbow.

It was responded to by his two porters and two assistants, for he never employed a clerk.

These were Vanderspiegel, commonly called Van, a stolid Dutch hired man, and Anak, a negro slave, the husband of the Aunt Susan, who has already been alluded to.

These men afforded a striking contrast to each other, apart from that of their complexions.

Van was almost as broad as he was long, and yet with indications of a muscularity which might be little short of the phenomenal.

Anak, on the contrary, was a coal-black Guinea negro, nearly seven feet in height, and of a corresponding lathiness of build, but chested like the main bulge of a cask, with enormously-developed arms and legs which likewise imparted the idea of vast muscular capacity, conjoined with an activity and hardness capable of almost any test.

Both were men past the middle age, yet seemingly in their prime of health and vigor, and of amiable aspect.

"Go into the cellar, you two," said Mr. Lord, "and set about the task as to which I have already instructed you."

When the porters had retired, the old merchant arose.

"Come hither to me, my dear children," he said, smiling. And when the youth and maiden had wonderingly complied, he linked their hands together, adding gravely: "I have long secretly remarked your growing and innocent love. Ye are therefore for each other, and I thus betroth ye formally, that ye may be married when I shall have passed away. May you be happy, my dear ones!"

Flushed and brightening with their unexpected happiness, neither Mercy nor Ben could at first quite credit the reality of this joyous announcement.

But the old gentleman did not give them time to be exuberant.

"Resume your seats," he continued, "and let me briefly explain the occasion of this action upon my part, which I rejoice to see is in consonance with your youthful hopes and affections.

"My children, I am old. Moreover, I am deeply troubled by the suspicions which these Britisher despots are beginning to have of me. And, added to this, I have lately been powerfully impressed with a premonition that death and I are not far apart.

"You both know that my heart, no less than

yours, is wholly given to our patriotic countrymen in this struggle for their national independence, and that I have long been a secret medium of communication between their political and military leaders and their friends here in this city, even while preserving an outward show of loyalty to the cause of the king and his red-coated or blue-coated satraps, of his armies and ships respectively, who have so long maintained the upper-hand of us in this community.

"Notably among the British authorities, Captain Scudder, of the Bellerophon, suspects the true state of the case with me. At any hour, now, chagrined to desperation by your refusal of his suit, my daughter, he may communicate his suspicions to Admiral Howe or to Sir Henry Clinton, if they do not already partake of them. In that case I am lost, and it is to provide you in some measure against such a misfortune to me that I have now summoned you before me. Now, come with me."

He took a lantern and conducted them to the deep cellar under the greater part of the store-house, which was stanchly built of wood, and of considerable extent.

Here, in a certain corner near the river-front, they found the porters just resting from their labor, after having raised a great flat stone from the ground, with much labor and the assistance of crowbars.

The stone was now on its edge at the side of a square hole in the ground, which it had covered after the manner of a lid, in which were disclosed a flight of stone steps leading down into the darkness.

Conducting the youth and maiden down these steps, the old merchant at last came to a pause before an iron-doored crypt at the side of a short tunnel leading out toward the dock, for the dash of the river waves could be distinctly heard.

"Here we are!" said he; and applying a key to the iron door, he forthwith opened it.

A large chest, fashioned of oak and strongly bound with iron and brass, was disclosed.

"This chest contains the savings of my busy lifetime," Mr. Lord explained, without preamble. "The sum is twenty thousand pounds in gold. It will be yours, my children, when I shall have passed away."

"There are savings in much more modest amount concealed in the garden of our residence, which you, my dear Mercy, are aware of."

"My porters are secret and honest. They will serve you no less faithfully than they have served me. These treasures are at present secure. Even should these buildings be given to the flames, they would remain undisturbed and intact. They are my daughter's dowry. This is all I have to say for the present. We will now return."

But they had no sooner remounted the steps, and the porters had only thrown back the great stone in place than there was a clamoring noise above, as if of the storehouse being broken into, after which there were the sounds of hoarse voices and shuffling feet.

"Quick, Anak, up with you!" exclaimed Mr. Lord, energetically. "You, too, Van! It may be a search-guard, and you must temporarily delay their intentions, whatever they may be."

The porters obeyed, while the old merchant at once took a couple of bottles of rare wine from some open cases at the side of the cellar.

"Follow my example!" he ordered. "There; now we'll do, I fancy. Keep cool, my children, and remember only this, that we are suddenly interrupted in certain innocent festivities."

When they had ascended into the warehouse, with the flasks of wine in their arms, it was to find a scene of confusion.

The place was half-full of red-coated grenadiers, with several of whom both Van and Anak were already engaged in a furious struggle, while prominent among several army and naval officers there was one spare-built, sour-visaged man who seemed to be chiefly responsible for the violent proceedings.

"What means this intrusion?" exclaimed Mr. Lord, indignantly. "Scoundrels, you have broken in my doors! You shall answer for this outrage upon a good and loyal man!"

"Continue the search!" ordered the sour-visaged officer, who was even more brilliantly-uniformed than any of his companions. "I have the strongest information that this old man is constantly in communication with the enemies of the king."

"Who and what are you, sir?" cried the old merchant, advancing fearlessly toward the speaker.

The latter surveyed him with a contemptuous look.

"I, sir," he replied, "am an officer of King George."

"But as a loyal man, knowing the greater number of King George's officers in high authority hereabouts, your person is strange to me, sir."

The sour-visaged officer's next words caused a thrill of surprise and horror in the breasts of Mercy and Ben, no less than in that of Mr. Lord.

"By name and fame, though," he replied, sarcastically, "I may not be unknown to you, old man. I am General Benedict Arnold!"

CHAPTER VI.

"FEARED AND DESPISED."

"YOU, sir," cried the old merchant, when sufficiently recovered from his surprise, "should be the last one to accuse me of treachery to the king's cause, to which you have so recently become a zealous convert."

The arc-traitor of the Revolution made a disdainful gesture.

"Let the search go on!" he continued. "I know of this man's treasonable correspondence with my recent associates in the Rebel Army, and am satisfied that documentary proofs can be produced somewhere in these premises."

In the mean time, in obedience to an order from the merchant, the Dutchman and negro had discontinued their resistance, and the search went on.

Arnold turned haughtily away and rejoined his fellow-officers, by whom it was easily seen that he was secretly both feared and despised.

His treason was at this period fresh in the minds of men, the unfortunate André, the confederate of his attempted crime, having been hanged at Tappan on the second day of October, only ten days previous to the opening of our story.

The search of Mr. Lord's premises, at the instigation of Arnold, and which would doubtless have ended in nothing even had it proceeded to the full, was suddenly cut short by the entrance of Captain Scudder, of the *Bellerophon*, attended by several of his officers.

"General Arnold," he said, with much severity of manner, "I think you might have consulted me before undertaking this distasteful measure. Mr. Lord is known to me *thus far*," with a significant glance in the merchant's direction, accompanied by a deferential look toward Mistress Mercy, "as an upright citizen, whose loyalty is not to be questioned. Let me see your warrant for this search, if you please."

Arnold disdainfully handed him his written authorization signed by the British commander-in-chief.

"This must have been granted under a mistaken apprehension of the facts," curtly observed the *Bellerophon*'s commander, after scanning the paper. "For the present at least, sir, I hold myself personally responsible for this gentleman's loyalty to the crown. I trust," handing back the warrant, "that you will abandon the search forthwith."

Arnold shrugged his shoulders, mumbled a few incoherent words, and that was the end of the embarrassing affair.

Scudder was the last intruder to take himself off, and he did so with a parting look of mingled pity and exultation toward father and daughter, as much as to say:

"You see I have managed to save you; let me hope that you will not prove ungrateful for the service."

"The scoundrels have not greatly disturbed my effects," observed the merchant, after a brief examination of his office books and papers. "But this is only the beginning of the end. My double-dealing is already suspected, which is tantamount to saying that I shall have little peace from the red-coats hereafter. Let us now go to dinner, and after that, Benjamin, we shall talk matters over as to the next immediate employment of the good sloop *Mercy Lord* under your command."

"I shall have certain suggestions to make in that regard, my dear father-in-law-to-be," replied the young man, cheerfully, "whose boldness may surprise you considerably."

Accordingly, an hour or two later, he unfolded in detail the plot which he had already fully formed for the capture of the traitor, Arnold, that very night, together with the subsequent capture of the corvette *Champion* at Perth Amboy, as a preliminary to transforming her in short order into a privateer of unexampled equipment for such service.

"If the first plot should fail," he went on, after duly amplifying upon his bold double scheme, "the second may none the less succeed; while the success of both successively would be simply immense in its advantage to the patriot cause."

"Why, just consider it. The delivery of Arnold into General Washington's resentful hands at his Newburg headquarters, that he might perish on the same gallows upon which the wretched André has already expiated his lesser offense, would at once win the general's sense of gratitude and good-will. Then, with the seizure of the corvette to follow, how soon we should have her spreading desolation among the British marine along the coast, under a regular letter-of-marque from Congress, and perhaps under a new and more terrible name!"

Mercy, who was present at the interview, clapped her hands, her face and eyes kindling with a reflection of her lover's patriotic enthusiasm.

"It is as good as done!" she cried. "And what shall be the brave corvette's name, when thus gallantly metamorphosed, Benjamin?"

"The *SEA HAWK*!" was the prompt reply. "I have thought it all out beforehand, you see."

"What better sea-name for the devastation

that she shall carry among the fluttering white wings of the British merchant marine!"

"Then my boyish experience with my sailor father on the French man-of-war, in which he was a sailing-master for two years, will serve me in excellent stead, to say nothing of my later seamanship in the Spanish Main and elsewhere. Besides, I shall have associated with me (for, of course, I shall be the *Sea Hawk*'s sole commander) veteran man-o'-war's men, such as Silas Martin and Thomas Simmons."

"The anxious thought of my mother and young sister will no longer fetter me, like a chained eagle, to the New Jersey shore. Prize-money will be abundant. The corvette is unrivaled as a skimmer. I shall chase down my prizes and outsail pursuit. There will be no longer a check to my fighting for my country, and on the blue water that I love. I shall career the waves, the pride of my country, the terror of her foes—a free rover of the sea!"

The old merchant had listened coldly enough to these heroics, though he had not failed to soberly digest the young man's more immediate plans.

"One thing at a time," said he, seriously, "and that is as to your projected capture of this detestable villain, Arnold. That accomplished, you can indulge in some of these fanciful flights with more show of sanity."

"I approve of this kidnapping plot, as you present it in detail. But you must not enlist the sloop in such service. Failure, with her consequent seizure, would at once result in detection, with consequent ruin upon our heads. The old lugger, the *Nancy Jane*, which I named after Mercy's mother so many years ago, is still fairly seaworthy, though this long time in neglect up yonder at my rustic dock on the King's Farms shore."

"Excellent!" cried Ben, catching at the idea. "Any band of desperate men might appropriate the old lugger on occasion without your being reasonably suspected of complicity in their designs. She will easily carry thirty men, at least—more than sufficient for this kidnapping as I have planned it. Martin, Simmons and the boy, Percy, will, in the mean time, be left in the *Mercy Lord* at her dock here, to further disarm suspicion, though, as all are stanch and true, there will be no objection to their being acquainted with my design."

"Then my fellow adventurers and I will all take the precaution of blackening our faces, rigging up as red-men, or otherwise disguising ourselves, before precipitating ourselves upon the traitor and his escort this evening. Fortunately, there is no moon just now. We shall have him, gagged and bound, on the *Nancy Jane* in a jiffy. Then, hey for the wooded ruggedness of Weehauken Heights, where we shall be sufficiently stupid if we do not manage to baffle pursuit until such time as we shall be able to spirit our accursed prisoner northward and into General Washington's hands. Courage, my dear friend! As Sweetheart Mercy declares, the brave job is as good as done."

"Can you get the requisite men?"

"Undoubtedly. At all events, I shall at once start out to make the effort. It will be strange if I cannot muster in short order from among the Sons of Liberty even in the despotic town enough daring spirits to carry the matter through."

"Wait!" said Mr. Lord, as the young man energetically sprang to his feet; "it is well that you should not go forth empty-handed."

He disappeared, and speedily returned with a bag of money, which he placed in Ben's hands.

"It contains one thousand dollars, as we Americans are beginning to compute money nowadays, but in English gold and silver coins," he observed. "Depart upon this mission of thine, Benjamin, and God grant that it lead you to profit and renown in behalf of the patriot cause!"

CHAPTER VII.

HIT OR MISS.

At dusk of that evening, which was to prove an eventful and pivotal one in our young hero's career, Ben, after being absent the greater part of the afternoon, presented himself once more at Mr. Lord's house, and signaled to Mercy that she should come out in the garden to him.

At first she did not know him, the light being uncertain and his face already blackened, but a few words reassured her.

"All is arranged, then?" exclaimed the young girl, half-terrified now that the trying test was at hand. "And your plot to capture the traitor is really well on foot, Benjamin?"

"Yes, an hour hence should tell the tale, and it must be hit or miss with us at one swift stroke. Twenty daring fellows are even now in the old lugger lying off King's Farms. I linger about her only until I shall see the launch put off from the *Bellerophon* yonder; or, rather, I shall wait till I observe the recontre between Captain Scudder and Mr. Sailing Master Manners up yonder at the false tryst where the latter shall be expectant of your coming. Then I shall rejoin my friends, and we shall be on the lookout for our prospective prey. Don't be alarmed, my darling. All will go well. Where is your father?"

"He has been summoned to General Clinton's headquarters, but upon nothing important, in his opinion; and he rather thought it a good thing that he should be absent from home when your attempt is to be made."

"Very likely; but are you not fearful of being thus alone in the house?"

"But I am not alone, dear. Aunt Susan is with me, while both Vau and Anak are on guard at the store house, as usual."

"Ah, that is well; while my daily associates in the sloop are calmly awaiting events at the dock adjoining. Dearest, farewell!"

Mercy threw herself into her lover's parting embrace, but managed to endure the parting bravely.

It was now quite dark, or nearly so, and, as Ben cautiously advanced toward the spot at which he had diplomatically received and stimulated the confidences of Captain Scudder and Mr. Midshipman Manners, he distinguished the elegant figure of the latter stalking, doubtless with all an expectant tryst-keeper's impatience, to and fro among the trees.

At the same moment there was the sound of the frigate's barge making her landing at the dock.

Ben slipped out of sight, and presently perceived a number of officers from the frigate, accompanied by a file of marines, come to a halt a short distance from his place of concealment on the road, dividing the old merchant's premises from the town green.

"Take care of yourself, general," Captain Scudder's voice was heard to say. "You will find your airing on the King's Farms shore very bracing, no doubt, and I shall have the pleasure of rejoining you there presently."

"Thanks, captain," Arnold's detested voice was heard to respond. "Don't hurry yourself on my account, pray."

Then the larger group, probably composed of the arch-traitor, two or three naval officers and half a dozen marines—many of the latter carrying links, or lanterns, while their superiors were smoking cigars—passed northward in the direction of King's Farms; a smaller group, apparently composed of the remaining marines, went along the road to the southward, after a few muttered directions which were not audible to the young man in hiding; while Scudder himself, after a brief pause, in which he seemed to be making sure that his movements were not observed, struck directly across the green.

Ben waited a few minutes, and then slipped after him.

High words were already in the air before he could quite reach the bogus trysting-place.

These were succeeded by the sound of sword striking against sword, and, by the time he was near enough to take in the scene with some degree of distinctness, the rival Britishers were hotly engaged in what might be a duel to the death.

Ben would gladly have cheered them on to such a consummation, had he dared.

"They're at it! they're at it!" he gleefully soliloquized, under his breath, rubbing his hands. "Jupiter! If they should only pink each other disastrously while Traitor Arnold is being neatly attended to half a mile away up yonder!"

With that, leaving the duelists to such fortune as fate might decree, he darted silently away through the down-trooping shadows of the night.

King's Farms was the large open tract of park and cultivated land skirting the bank of the Hudson directly to the north of St. Paul's Church grounds, at that period extending completely back from the church to the water's edge, as any reference to a map of the comparatively insignificant little New York of Revolutionary times will demonstrate.

Scouting along the river's edge, Barnacle Ben soon located Arnold and his group again.

They seemed to be laughing, talking and smoking, in the most unsuspecting of moods, on a green little knoll a short distance back from the river, their figures showing indistinctly through the last lingering of the twilight, while now and then the sharp popping of a champagne cork suggested a quiet festivity as the order of the hour.

Ben slipped on between them and the water until he sighted the lugger silently moored against the bank under the concealing overhang of an immense chestnut tree, which was one of the picturesque boasts of the locality.

Dropping close under the bank, he gave the preconcerted signal—the sharp imitation of a catbird's night-call, four times repeated.

Instantly it was responded to.

Twenty daring men or more suddenly swarmed out of the lugger, and yet with the utmost noiselessness to the shore, where they clustered expectantly, like so many grotesque phantoms of the dusk, around their young leader.

They were variously armed, though mostly with stout cudgels, the faces of all were blackened, and a certain number, moreover, disported themselves in full Indian costume, war-paint, tomahawk and scalping-knives included, though there were no firearms.

Ben made an exultant gesture signifying that the fruit was ready for the plucking, and then

addressed himself to a tall, powerful young fellow who carried himself like a sailor, and seemed to be invested with some authority over his comrades.

"Hist, Miles!" he warned. "How many are left in the lugger?"

"Four," was the reply.

"So that sail can be made in an instant?"

"Yes."

"Follow me! the game's afoot."

Five minutes later, and without a particle of warning, the motley gang fell upon the astounded Arnold and his party like a veritable thunderbolt out of the darkness.

The surprise and victory were alike instantaneous and complete.

Such of the marines on guard as were not summarily beaten down by the invisible cudgel-blows, forthwith took to their heels, firing their muskets in the air as they fled.

Arnold and his companion officers, five in number, had only just time to whip out their swords—for they were all brave men—before they were overpowered, the latter being beaten into insensibility as the best mode of disposing of them, and the arch-traitor himself thrown down and bound helplessly hand and foot.

In less than five minutes after the attack, the renegade was lying in the bottom of the lugger, which was speeding away before a fresh wind for the wild Jersey shore to the northwest.

Darkly-threatening faces bending over him were dimly revealed by the uncertain rays of a lantern or two, which also showed the traitor's upturned face to be very pale, though maintaining his composure.

However, he could not but divine the object of his capture, and his mental tortures were doubtless past conception.

"Scoundrels!" he exclaimed for the first time; "what is the significance of this outrage upon a king's officer, and whither are you taking me?"

"Outrage be hanged, as you will be, cursed traitor!" roared Miles Hobby, Ben's chief lieutenant in the enterprise. "It's to follow André in his air-dance under the gallows-tree—that's where we are taking you! And we're mightily mistaken if General Washington isn't grateful enough when we shall hand you over to his tender mercies at Newburg."

"It is true," observed Ben, while the rest of the motley crew clamored their curses over the detested captive. "It was hit or miss with tonight's work, and I rather think the target has been touched dead in the center."

But, prognostication is uncertain even at short-range shooting.

Twenty minutes later there was a stern hail out of the obscurity, accompanied by theplash of oars; then the prow of a long-boat, crowded with men, was dimly descried coming nearer and nearer, head-on.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BRAVE SCHEME FOILED.

"HEAVE to, and give an account of yourselves!" was suddenly bellowed out of the darkness.

At the same instant a volley of musketry was fired out of the long-boat, the leaden messengers whistling unpleasantly close over the heads of the lugger's inmates, while the outlines of another and yet another ship's boat, likewise apparently filled with men, loomed up on the track of the first.

There was probably not one of the kidnappers upon whom the baffling significance of this interception did not flash at this moment.

One of the British frigates anchored further up the stream had somehow taken the alarm, and these were her boats sent out on an investigation.

"About ship!" shouted Ben, to the man at the helm.

Then, as the lugger came about readily and began to tack away, he seized one of the muskets which had been captured along with the prisoner in the shore assault, and banged away at the foremost of the pursuing boats, a wild cry as of a sorely-wounded man, following upon the report of the gun.

"Courage, mates!" he cried. "We're honest men in the pursuit of an honest vocation, and have nothing to fear from all the foreign minnows in these free waters. Give way, there!"

"But at this instant the prisoner unexpectedly started up into a sitting position.

"It's a lie!" he yelled, with preternatural shrillness. "I'm Benedict Arnold, and these villains are kidnapping me!"

A blow in the mouth prostrated him, and choked his further utterance.

But the mischief was done.

Another volley was poured into the lugger, with the effect of slightly wounding several of her men, and, though she was now about holding her own with her pursuers, her course was now wholly altered.

In other words, she was compelled to tack on her tracks in a way that could scarcely fail to attract the attention of the Bellerophon—in which event boats would doubtless put off from her with the effect of hopelessly cutting off the adventurers' escape.

Still there remained a chance of making the wooded Jersey shore to the southwest, though the barest one.

"Cheer up, my hearties!" shouted Ben, bravely. "The old craft tacks beautifully, we're more than holding our own, and we can drown Mr. Arnold if need be, though it is a pity to cheat the gibbet."

A chorus of shouts greeted his words, and some one proposed to hang the traitor, then and there, there being sufficient yard-arm stretch from the lugger's mainmast to convenience the job.

But, soberer counsel unfortunately prevailed.

And now a sudden flash started up from the Manhattan shore, which speedily grew into a great lurid light, behind which the steeple of old St. Paul's and other prominent objects in the city were distinctly outlined.

At the same time there was a great ringing of bells and other indications of a general alarm being given.

The lugger was meantime on the port tack, in which she was doing yet better in drawing away from the man-of-war's boats, though this of course brought her more directly back on her original wake than before, and almost straight for the Bellerophon, while the surface of the water was momentarily brightening up under the reflection of the conflagration.

"What can be burning?" exclaimed Ben, while there were various running comments and conjectures from his associates.

At last the sailor, Miles Hobby, cried out:

"Why, it's old Lord's buildings, sure as a gun!"

Then the terrible truth flashed upon him, while at the same instant a twenty-four-pound shot sung over the lugger from the bow-gun of the Bellerophon.

Armed boats were also putting off from her side, while other craft began to swarm out from the shore showing out distinctly in the lurid light.

It was evident that the lugger was doomed, either her destruction or capture being beyond question.

"My poor darling girl!" thought Ben, as a sharp fear as to what might have chanced to Mercy Lord and her father came rushing into his brain.

Then the lugger was knocked to pieces by a second shot from the frigate, everybody was in the water, and the world swam before his eyes; after which he lost his senses.

When he recovered them he was lying on his back on a deck, with rough but kindly faces bending over him, while the light of the conflagration had almost died away.

"Where am I?" he said, sitting up.

"Where but on the Mercy Lord?" replied Silas Martin, with a glad laugh. "Don't you recognize your own sloop, Captain Ben?"

"Ah, now I do," slowly and dimly. "How was it you picked me up?"

"You were sticking like a leech to a plank of the lugger—trust Barnacle Ben for that!" with another cheery laugh, in which the old sailor was joined by his fellow-rescuers—Tom Simmons and little Frank Percy, as a matter of course. "No one saw us pick you up, either, and the black has washed off your face into the bargain. So brace up, my hearty. Not a red-coat or blue-jacket need suspect your ever having been elsewhere than right here with the rest of us in the Mercy Lord straight along."

The old sailor's first sentence was an allusion to the manner in which the young skipper had received his sobriquet.

Several years previously, when a mere boy, he had come ashore, the sole survivor of a wild shipwreck off Barnegat, and clinging so closely to a narrow foot-plank that it was only with difficulty his barnacle-like clutch had been torn away from it, nearly drowned as he was, and the nickname had persistently clung to him ever since.

Ben now managed to get upon his feet and look around him.

"My unfortunate companions of the lugger?" was his next query.

"Doubtless every one of 'em safe on the Jersey shore," was the reply. "At any rate, the lugger wasn't far off from Jersey soundings when knocked to pieces, and the hull gang of 'em seemed to be swimming like dolphins."

"And our prisoner, the traitor Arnold?"

"We saw the Bellerophon's jolly-boat picking something up just as we yanked you in over the sloop's side. Like enough it was the rascal."

"It must have been," interposed the boy, Frank. "I think I heard him croak, while whatever they picked up was floating like a log, as a bound critter might have done."

"Yes, yes!" added Simmons; "and God wouldn't have let the traitorous brute cheat the rope by drowning, sure."

"Still, Providence let him slip out of our clutches, when we had him fairly enough headed for the gibbet!" cried Ben, despondently; after which he eagerly inquired the particulars about the conflagration.

His companions could furnish him with none.

The alarm of Arnold's seizure had at once spread through the town, and they had been

among the first to put off as soon as the musket-firing had come floating down on the wind.

They were well out upon the river when the first flash from the conflagration had sprung up, and the wooden buildings, both warehouse and residence, had burned like tinder.

"Head straight on for the old dock!" cried Ben, anxiously. "God grant that no personal harm may have befallen Mistress Mercy"—a lump was in his throat as he pronounced the beloved name—"and her father! but we must lose no time in making the investigation."

The sloop was already headed thereaway, the breeze having fallen away to almost nothing.

Half an hour later, when not far from the dock, there was a great expiring flash from the smoldering ruins beyond.

It revealed the gig of the Bellerophon cutting back from shore to frigate under the powerful impetus of her six ably-managed oars.

Captain Scudder was sitting in the stern-sheets, a white bandage about his left cheek, a white-clad female figure clasped close to his side, partly shielded from view by the heavy folds of his boating-cloak.

As the light gleamed fitfully but brightly over both boats, this figure started up with a wild cry.

It was Mercy herself, pale as a ghost, and with her arms stretched out toward the sloop, whereon Ben's figure stood out prominently, before Scudder's impatient grasp dragged her back to his side.

"All is lost, Ben—lost, lost, lost!" she wailed out despairingly. "They have killed my father, burned our home, and now they are carrying me off!"

CHAPTER IX.

A HOME-WRECK.

THEN the flash died away away, darkness once more closed over dock, shore and water, and nothing was heard but the receding splash of the long-boat's oars.

Ben had sunk down on the sloop's rail, momentarily paralyzed by the strangeness and horror of it all, with despair and murderous rage alternating for the mastery in his breast.

Martin's heavy, but kindly, hand was laid on his shoulder.

"Don't take too black an outlook, messmate," said the old sailor, cheerfully. "It's bad enough to know that the old owner has passed to his account, but, as for the young lady herself, the frigate folk are only taking care of her in her misfortune, that is all."

"You really think so?" and Ben began to pick up a little.

"Sartain, man! Why, that Scudder ain't half a bad 'un, Britisher though he be; and who else among the big-bugs would there be to look after the poor stricken young thing in her distress?"

"But she cried out that she was being carried off!"

"Why, of course, an' with her pretty little head natively enough in a whirl over what has chanced. She'll turn up all right. Be a man!"

"I'll not forget to be that, anyway!" cried Ben, starting up.

Awaiting them on the deck were three figures, Van, the great Dutchman, Anak, the giant negro, and Aunt Susan, his wife, the latter crying bitterly, and with her woolly head done up in a blood-stained bandage.

The story of the misfortune, as gathered from them, was a brief one.

Directly following the tremendous excitement that had been kicked up throughout the town by the alarm over the traitor's kidnapping, Mr. Lord had returned home from headquarters. Then the store and residence had been attacked by a mob of drunken soldiers.

Mr. Lord had fallen dead under a random bullet at the outset. The porters had been overpowered, Susan was blinded by a saber-stroke, and the buildings were in flames, with Mercy Lord already in the grasp of the intoxicated crew when Captain Scudder had rescued her, with the assistance of several of his tars.

He was wounded himself, having received a painful sword-thrust in the cheek, in his duel with Midshipman Manners, who had been carried off by friends, with a deep and perhaps fatal stab in the thigh.

Mistress Mercy had been tenderly conveyed by her rescuer to a hostelry in the more thickly settled end of the town; and when she had been brought again to the dock for passage in the Bellerophon's gig, she had essayed a resistance, while seemingly half out of her mind.

This was all.

But it put a brighter aspect on the case, so far as the young lady's particular fate was concerned.

The party on the dock proceeded up in the direction of the ruins, and about this time the moon arose, bright and clear.

The town was buried in repose, though a few idlers still lingered curiously about the charred and smoking remnants of the home-wreck.

The body of the old merchant was found in the garden.

A shot had struck him directly in the center of the forehead, and his death had doubtless been instantaneous.

John Lord had been a kind master and considerate employer, one against whose good name nothing could be ever said.

Ben pathetically laid his hand upon the cold forehead, and then, under his directions, the body was taken up and carried to the hostelry at which Mercy had found shelter before being carried off to the frigate.

At noon of the following day, after a hurried inquest, the remains were followed to the grave in St. Paul's churchyard by a large concourse, Mercy Lord being present, under Captain Scudder's escort, as Ben had expected she would be.

The young woman was very pale, but bore up with commendable fortitude during the ceremony, and once she managed to convey to her lover a significant look, which brought him slouchingly in her vicinity, for he had once more assumed his awkward, simpleton look for the benefit of such Britishers as were present, and they were not a few.

But she maintained a crushed, hopeless air throughout, seeming to press close to Captain Scudder's side in a timid, protection-craving way that was evidently not a little to that elderly officer's liking.

However, just before passing back to the frigate's launch with him and his escort, she slipped a note into the young man's hand.

It was as follows:

"I am practically Captain Scudder's prisoner, but can and will escape if you follow my directions.

"Be under the frigate's stern somehow after dusk this evening in a small boat. You had better disguise yourself, and pretend to be fishing.

"In the mean time, have the treasure my poor father showed us secretly conveyed on board the sloop, which should be in waiting over in the vicinity of the Jersey shore.

"She should be provisioned, and Van, Anak and Susan should likewise be with her crew.

"Should we be compelled to take to the woods over there, I have an old aunt living near Elizabeth who would aid us to escape pursuit; or it may be best for us to try to reach General Washington at Newburg by water, but circumstances must decide.

"Keep out of sight as much as possible during the day. Arnold's kidnapping—he is back on board the frigate, safe and sound, but with the temper of a fiend—has caused intense exasperation in British naval and army circles, and I fear that your connection with it may leak out at any moment.

"My beloved, my darling! you are all I have left me in the world now, and you will not fail me in this.

"I say nothing of last night's horror. This tear-blotted page will show you the anguish I suffer, while thus forcing myself to think and write of other things.

"The minor treasure that was buried in the garden is already in my possession. M. L."

With a more hopeful heart as to the future, Ben managed to carry out the directions embodied in this letter.

Fortunately, the night was settling down windy and threatening when he at last succeeded in pulling out in a small boat, with muffled oars, under the Bellerophon's stern-overhang, without attracting attention.

He wore a false beard and was provided with fishing-tackle, in accordance with Mercy's suggestion, though the night was coming down so inkily dark that it was not likely the disguise would be tested.

Ben patiently waited.

Lights were glistening in the after ports, and he could hear the measured tread of the marines on sentry duty at either side of the poop-deck, with an occasional buzz of voices from among the jack-tars forward.

Marine torpedoes were scarcely thought of in these days, but a vague suggestion of their utility arose in the young man's busy brain as he looked up at the towering black bulk, with its grinning port-holes, looming high above him in the darkness, and he so near, like a crab at an elephant's heel, without his proximity being so much as dreamed of except perchance by the one dear one of his heart at whose bidding he was rocking there on the short waves in the windy night.

"Good Lord!" he thought; "with Mercy only out of this huge man-o'-war, how easy it would be to blow the critter into the middle of next week by a barrel of gunpowder softly slung there betwixt stern-post and rudder, with a slow-match attached!"

A cautious, "Hist!" just above his head caused him to glance up with a start.

There was sufficient reflection from the port lights to enable him to make out a boyish head, with a jaunty glazed tarpaulin hat atop of it, peering anxiously down at him from one of the cabin-ports.

Then, plump! a soft bundle, deftly dropped, fell into the boat; a dangling line followed; the shoulders came out after the head, then the whole body of a trim, sailor-built youth, and, a moment later, by a clever hand under hand practice, he, too, was in the little craft!

"Don't look so wonder-struck; it's me, Mercy Lord, and that bundle contains my discarded garments!" whispered the new-comer, fearfully. "Give 'way, my darling, and for heaven's sake be extra-cautious! My trick may be discovered at any moment."

CHAPTER X.

UP AND AWAY.

BEN bent to his oars without a word, though still wondering greatly, the muffled blades dipping soundlessly, but none the less effectively into the chopping waves.

When a safe distance from the frigate had been attained, Mercy briefly explained her transformation.

She had kept her cabin during the entire afternoon, without much fear of intrusion, by reason of her bereavement, and while rummaging among some drawers had come upon the masculine costume, which had probably belonged to some boyish midshipman, and there she was.

"The clothes do not fit me badly," she said; apologetically, in conclusion, "and, moreover, I hardly think I could have been able to make my way down to you without effecting the change."

"They become you beautifully," cried Ben, "and you are sure to find the togs more convenient than your petticoats, my darling."

He then hurriedly sketched the upshot of his previous night's adventure, while making as little allusion as possible to the terrible home-wreck and tragedy of the shore.

"Where is the sloop now?" asked Mercy.

"In a deep cove over yonder on the Jersey shore," he replied. "We ought to be aboard in less than half an hour now."

"The slaves and Vanderspiegel are with the others?"

"Yes."

"And the treasure chest?"

"Just as you directed, my darling, and something else besides."

"What is it?"

"A chest of your wardrobe, which Aunt Susan had succeeded in saving from the conflagration, in spite of the cruel slash she got from one of the drunken brutes."

"Oh! And you succeeded in doing all this without attracting suspicion?"

"Yes."

"I am more glad of that than you can imagine."

"Why?"

"From a conversation I overheard between Captain Scudder and his second in command, I am sure you are suspected of being the head and front of the kidnapping attempt."

"Oho!"

"Yes, indeed! The whole affair will be recounted officially in a printed bulletin to-morrow morning. Had you lingered another hour in New York, the probability is that you would have been arrested and thrown into one of their horrible prison-ships. Oh, Benjamin, thank God it is as it is, and that we are together!"

"Amen with all my heart, Mercy! But, what so fortunately prompted you to dig up the treasure in the garden prior to the—the tragedy?"

Mercy suddenly shook like a leaf, and she seemed about to give way to the recollection of her bereavement, but by a great effort she controlled herself.

"I don't know what it was—a sort of unaccountable foreboding of approaching ill, I suppose. The garden treasure is in my bosom now. It is not a large package, though containing five hundred pounds in Bank of England notes."

Her lover hastened to change the subject.

"What do you suppose Captain Scudder's intentions were with regard to you?" he asked.

"It was doubtless his intention to take me to England—to his sister, the duchess, there—at an early day, with or without my consent. I don't know but"—she hesitated—"but that he might also have insisted on marrying me first."

"Mercy!"

"Well, Benjamin?"

"You—you would have a rich and easy time as the idolized bride of a man of Captain Scudder's wealth, power and position."

"Indeed?"

"Why, of course! Like enough he'll be a duke, or something of the sort, some day, and then you'd be a duchess you know."

"What a truly brilliant outlook! But, see here, Mr. Harrup, if you don't stop talking this sort of nonsense I'll just order you to about ship and row me back to the man you seem to admire so greatly."

"I rather think I'll stop it, then," and Ben continued rowing straight ahead.

They reached the sloop without mishap, and there found that her inmates had been joined by Miles Hobby and another of the discomfited adventurers of the previous evening.

"There wasn't one of us but escaped to the woods hereabouts," Miles reported. "And, Barnacle, my man, as soon as you care to start another expedition on foot we'll be ready to join you. In the mean time, we can keep Gypsying among the farmers hereabouts, without much danger of the red-coats running us to earth."

Ben reflected a moment, and then asked:

"General Washington still has his headquarters at Newburg, has he not?"

"He had not removed them at latest advices."

"Do you think we could run the sloop up

there without interception on the part of the Britishers?"

"Under cover of darkness, yes, without a doubt. Why, with this up-stream gale blowing, the distance ought to be covered before next daybreak. But one would have to know the river well in order to hug close as occasion might demand when in the neighborhood of the blockaders."

"That is the difficulty. I don't believe one of my men knows anything about North River navigation north of Tarrytown, and I am very certain that I don't."

"Ah, but I know it like a book! and I'll be your pilot if you say the word."

The word was said eagerly enough, and half an hour later the sloop Mercy Lord was bowing northward before the gale, with Miles Hobby at the helm.

His companion, however, had been previously sent back into the Jersey woods with word to his fellow-castaways that they should hold themselves in readiness for a fresh enterprise, under Ben Harrup's leadership, at the shortest notice.

The run to Newburg was accomplished without misadventure, and a little later on our young adventurer approached the picturesque little headquarters house on the round hill which is at this centennial day being sacredly preserved as one of the most interesting landmarks of Revolutionary times.

On making known his request for an audience with the American commander-in-chief to the orderly on duty, a staff officer was communicated with as a preliminary.

Ben was then conducted into a small, primitive-furnished room overlooking the river, and told rather curtly to remain there and wait till the general's convenience could be consulted.

The young man looked about him in the empty room with a feeling akin to awe.

There was a coarse, heavy curtain of some homespun material hanging across a door that doubtless gave entrance into an adjoining room; and a deal writing table, covered with writing materials in considerable confusion, and with a sword and scabbard leaning against one corner of it, stood squarely in the center of the floor, while several serviceable hard-bottomed chairs were disposed here and there.

This was all, there being neither ornament of any description on the bare, whitewashed walls, nor any beautifying attempt whatever; and yet there was the atmosphere of a majestic presence around and over all which impressed the rough coastwise young American with a sense of something—not wholly admiration, not altogether an awed expectancy, and yet partaking of both emotions—that he would have found it difficult to analyze or describe.

The staff-officer looked in at the entrance door again, to say, gravely:

"Young man, the general will see you presently," after which Barnacle Ben was once more left to his own cogitations.

He looked out upon the river for lack of something better with which to occupy his thoughts, and presently interested in the evolutions of a squad of ragged-looking Continental troops in conjunction with some boats that were busily passing to and fro between the steep landing, and a large schooner which was probably one of the few transport or provision vessels in the service of the American Army.

"What a contrast between those stout-heared but ragged soldiers and the smart red-coated, white-belted British grenadiers one can see strutting about the streets of New York!" he thought, with a flash of patriotic indignation.

"It is a lamentable, burning pity!"

A movement in the room caused him to turn quickly.

The curtain over the inner door had parted to give entrance to a towering, careworn man in full Continental uniform.

It was the immortal Washington!

Ben bowed his head with a sense of trepidation and embarrassment.

CHAPTER XI.

A ROVING COMMISSION.

GENERAL WASHINGTON gravely signed his visitor to a seat, and then, seating himself at the writing-table, by another gesture, dignified to the last degree and yet full of benevolence, signified that he was expected to state his business in the shortest possible terms.

The overpowered young man began to blurt out his story, making a poor enough and sufficiently incoherent job of it at the outset.

But a look of eager surprise and interest in the general's face as he began to get into the thick of his kidnapping enterprise of the recent evening encouraged him greatly, and he soon warmed up to his narrative work, expressing himself clearly, graphically, and at the same time with a frank ingenuousness that was not without a charm of its own.

"My young friend," the general asked, rather abruptly, as soon as everything had been told, "how old are you?"

"Twenty-two, sir," was the somewhat astonished response.

"The news you bring me from New York, sir, is not fresh, save in its details," said General

Washington. "A secret courier brought it to me night before last. Your unfortunate employer, Mr. John Lord, was creditably known to me as a man of patriotic instincts, who was of much secret service to our struggling cause. The bold but unsuccessful enterprise to deliver the traitorous Arnold"—his eye flashed, while his lips became sternly compressed—"into my power was none the less praiseworthy because of its failure. So then, Mr. Benjamin Harrup," after a reflective pause, "it was to your youth, valor and energy that this hardy and desperate essay was due?"

Ben stammered forth some modest words in the affirmative.

"Sir, you deserve nobly of your country, and she has a right to expect more service of you in the future. There is my hand!"

The huge, powerful hand, laced at the wrist (Lafayette declared that Washington had the biggest hands he had ever seen; and the Father of his Country is also said, on excellent later authority, to have required No. 13 boots), was impulsively extended.

The youth fell upon his knee and would have kissed it, but that the general withdrew his hand with a grand air.

"There should be no obsequious kissing of men's hands in a republic, young sir," he said, somewhat sternly. "Mine is once more offered for your acceptance."

The young man then gratefully pressed the extended hand, and Washington once more motioned him to a seat.

"Apart from this service that you have so nobly striven to render the country," he then said, "I have found your private history picturesque and interesting. You are a sailor?"

"Almost from my childhood up, general."

"What do you want to do?"

"To obtain, command and man a letter-of-marque privateer!" was the enthusiastic response.

General Washington smiled a little sadly.

"Easier asked than given," he replied. "Congress finds difficulty in raising even paper money enough with which to pay our soldiers. There is nothing for ships, of which we would like enough be all but destitute save for our generous ally, France. But," impatiently, "you are intelligent enough to know this without being told."

"I do know it, general. But I do not ask the Congress to supply me with a ship. All I want of Congress is a *lettre de marque* commission. I shall supply myself with a ship."

The general looked at him with no little surprise.

"Pardon me the suggestion," smiling, "but you do not look to be rich enough to purchase and equip a ship, my young friend."

"Neither am I so, general, though I am not without certain moneys at my command. But I never had any idea of purchasing a ship."

"How then do you propose obtaining one?"

"By seizure—capture!"

"Come, those words have a brave ring in them! And what vessel would you thus seize, sir?"

"The British corvette, Champion."

The great commander started.

"What!" he said, half to himself; "the crack sailor of the English navy—twenty guns and magnificently manned and equipped—American-built, at that."

"The same, general, and at present lying at Perth Amboy, with half her aristocratic officers on temporary furlough, the majority of the remainder picnicking from day to day with the pretty American girls thereabouts, and presumably with a corresponding relaxation of discipline among her crew."

The general's grand face had become animated.

"You are capitally informed," he said. "What is your plan?"

This was something which the young man had long and carefully considered—in fact, it was the idolized and elaborated scheme of the greater part of his thoughts for a twelvemonth past—and he was accordingly prepared to elucidate it to the full, and in varying aspects.

Washington listened attentively, and then gravely nodded his approval.

"It is just such hazardous, seemingly all but desperate enterprises that so often succeed," he said, to himself. "And with such a ship as the swift, superbly-equipped corvette to carry destruction unexpectedly here, there and everywhere, like a destroying besom, among the enemy's merchantmen, while perhaps able to fight for her life with the best of his cruisers!"

His eyes kindled.

"You have my authority and good-speed in your enterprise, young sir," he continued, aloud, and with an affability sufficiently rare in his serious, self-contained temperament. "Should you succeed, I shall answer for your obtaining from Congress the letter-of-marque and reprisal which you covet with the utmost promptness."

"Oh, thank you, general, thank you! Trust me for rendering a good account of myself."

Ben had risen, hat in hand, but still hesitated.

"Speak out, if you have anything more to ask, sir," prompted the general, kindly.

"There is just one thing, general."

"What is it?"

"A written authorization or commendation of my plot in your hand, sir," replied the youth, boldly. "It would be a sort of roving commission in the interim, and might assist me immensely in getting together my recruits."

The general remained thoughtful for a moment; then, abruptly seizing pen and paper, he rapidly indited the desired authorization in his large round hand, affixed his seal to the document, and, rising to indicate that the interview was terminated, handed it to the petitioner.

Ben Harrup pressed the precious paper to his heart, and murmured his thanks, while bowing almost to the ground.

When he had straightened himself once more he was again alone, General Washington having silently stepped back through the curtained door.

Ben fairly flew back to the sloop, showing the certificate as a trophy, and giving a glowing account of the interview.

One after another, his companions examined the document, curiously or intelligently, and Miles Hobby, who had had some experience in army service, with a critical air.

"General Washington has even done better by you than he was requested, Ben," said he. "This is not only an authorization for you to raise recruits for special service, but also a passport that will carry you safely through any of our army lines."

"So it is!" exclaimed Ben, now reading the paper for the first time thoroughly himself. "Hurrah! all will be plain sailing now, and before a spanking breeze!"

Last, but far from being least, Mercy Lord, who had by this time resumed the garments appropriate to her sex, took the paper and perused it carefully.

"You say that it is all plain sailing now, Benjamin," she said, returning it to him. "What then are your next steps in this undertaking?"

"I've thought it all out, my dear," replied the young adventurer gayly. "You and I, accompanied by Anak and Susan, shall set out at once, overland, for Perth Amboy. The rest of them here shall make the attempt to reach the same place in the Mercy Lord, making a rendezvous there with our band still lurking in the woods in the vicinity of Communipaw. After that we shall see how the game opens."

CHAPTER XII. LAYING THE TRAIN.

THIS plan seemed the very best that could be adopted, and was approved by every one present without a dissenting voice.

The two parties accordingly divided about midday, Silas Martin as mate-commander of the sloop-contingent, so to speak, being liberally supplied with money by Mercy, with which to defray the incidental expenses of that part of the expedition.

But, prior to this separation, Ben and Mercy, accompanied solely by the slaves, had conveyed the treasure-chest from the hold of the sloop to a secure hiding-place in the wild woods not far back from the shore, after retaining out of the twenty thousand dollars it contained what they supposed would be sufficient for their expenditure for some months to come.

In addition to this, Mercy had the greater part of the five hundred pounds she had dug up out of her home-garden in her possession, so that they were very well provided, considering the widespread poverty of those "times that tried men's souls," as the stanchly patriotic though atheistical Tom Paine had so graphically expressed it.

The intention was for the sloop to start on the return trip down the river as soon as night should fall.

As for the overland party, horses having been secured, they set out at once over the rough army road, and made their first halt at Cornwall, where they decided to remain over night.

Mercy had once more assumed the midshipman's dress, as a prudential measure in consideration of the dangers of the way.

Though nearly the entire wild country through which their route would carry them was at that period virtually in the possession of the patriot army and their sympathizers, lawlessness was almost everywhere abroad, perhaps stimulated rather than represesed by the fluctuating presence of armed skirmishers and scouting-parties.

After talking the matter over, it had been finally decided by the young couple that they should get married almost immediately upon their arrival at Widow Harrup's house, in Perth Amboy.

This was decided upon, in spite of the newness of the young woman's bereavement, and apart from personal affinities, inasmuch as Mercy was determined to take an active part in her lover's fortunes, which, now at the very opening, promised to be of the most stirring and adventurous character.

"All that I have of wordly wealth shall be yours, Benjamin," Mercy had said, in her sweet, serious way—for her old pretty smile had been a stranger to her comely face from that tragic and tempestuous hour which had cost her a fa-

ther and the homestead of her birth. "Or, rather, together we will apply it to our country's cause; and if anything over and above should accrue to us, it shall be for our domestic enjoyment when the independence of our young, free nation is assured, as God in His wisdom grant that it soon shall be! I am satisfied it would have best pleased my dear father that his savings should thus be applied when he was gone. Indeed, he often hinted as much to me. And, moreover, underneath my outward seeming I think I have a strong vein of Amazonian robustness and hardihood in my nature, which may not ill-consort with your designs in behalf of the cause. Besides, you must remember that my father was a follower of the sea upon occasion, and that I made numerous voyages in his company, so that I am not an indifferent sailor at the worst."

Then her lover had kissed her tenderly, inasmuch as nothing could have been more in harmony with his secret wishes than these bravely-expressed sentiments of hers. And thus this important element of their future had been definitely agreed on between them.

The next day they proceeded as far as Hackensack.

Ben had an uncle residing here, a certain one-legged old Captain Bumper, the Widow Harrup's brother, a bachelor and fiery-hearted old patriot, who had served with Admiral John Paul Jones up to the world-famous sea fight between the Bon Homme Richard and the Serapis, wherein he had lost the leg which had necessitated his retirement, sorely enough against his will, for, apart from this disability, the old fellow was still hale and hearty in his three-score-and-ten.

Captain Bumper was, moreover, in distressingly needy circumstances, which his nephew was now able to relieve. He at once became an enthusiastic partisan in the scheme in hand, and promised to rally twenty good men and true in its interests, whom he engaged to produce at a certain rendezvous in the vicinity of Perth Amboy within one week thence.

"Count on me, my boy!" cried the veteran, when this arrangement had been finally perfected. "If old Joe Bumper isn't on hand with his cutlass-swingers according to contract, may you revile his memory from this hour, and may pretty Mistress Brighteyes, your bride to be, never again beam benignantly upon my grizzled old head-lights, as she is beaming at this minute! Now you shall try a glass of apple-jack punch of my own decoction—thank the Lord there's plenty of the pure old stuff since you chanced along with the wherewithal!—and I'll pledge success to our future privateering."

They declined the treat, and left him as the recruiting officer of the district, the business having already detained them for the remainder of the day.

Resuming their journey by daybreak of the following morning, they reached Elizabeth, where a visit to Mrs. Halstead, Mercy's aunt, was in order.

This lady was a well-to-do widow, with two stalwart sons, seafaring men just then out of employment, and eager for something to turn up.

These young men gladly enough enlisted in Ben's enterprise, and succeeded in inducing four of their neighbors, likewise capable and adventure-seeking men, to join them before the day was done.

Indeed, they were nothing loth to going directly on to the rendezvous without delay.

Accordingly the party, with this addition of six, proceeded on their way, greatly encouraged by the outlook, reaching Perth Amboy by a forced march before noon on the following day.

The sloop had preceded them thither by more than twenty-four hours, having safely run the river and harbor blockade without mishap or noticeable incident.

Leaving their recruits under the directions of Silas Martin, who had previously received general instructions as to the place of rendezvous and other matters, Ben and Mercy lost no more time in hastening to the former's home.

It was a pleasant cottage, not far from the water, and the Widow Harrup and her daughter, who was about Mercy's own age, gave them such a greeting as was sufficient compensation for the discomforts of their journey.

"The dreadful home-news has come before you, my dear," was the widow's only allusion to Mercy's terrible affliction, as she kissed her tenderly, after the secret of the midshipman's costume had been explained to her. "Mr. Martin brought it out."

"And Benjamin will find himself a much more distinguished personage than perhaps he ever dreamed of being here in his native town," struck in Mary Harrup, with a glowing look for her brother, while passing her arm affectionately about the counterfeit sailor youth's waist.

"How is that, sissy?" asked Ben.

"Oh, the secret of your having led the band that so nearly delivered Traitor Arnold to the hangman has passed among us like wild fire, you dear, gallant boy!"

"Come, I don't like that!" protested Ben, somewhat anxiously.

"What! you failed, to be sure. But, it was a brave, hardy thing, and it was a thing to have striven and fought for, even to have had the arch-traitor for but an hour or so at your mercy, Benjamin."

"I am not disposed to dispute the t. But I find Amboy virtually in the hands of the British just now, you see. The officers and men of the corvette seem to have fairly captured the place for their jollifications, while their ship is undergoing painting and repairs at the ship-yard out yonder by the Point. And it may interfere with my plans seriously to have them suspect me of that other trick."

"Do not think it, Benjamin," interposed the widow. "This new brave plan has already been whispered to us by the sloop's people, and the prestige you have gained among right-feeling Americans ought to more than counterbalance any such danger or disadvantage. Why, you are already a hero. You can get all the recruits among the daring fellows hereabouts for this new venture of yours by the mere raising of your hand—my brave boy!"

"Well, that is worth knowing," said Ben, more easy as to the security of his plot. "That, together with General Washington's written approval and authorization, ought to go a long way."

Mary, who was a very sentimental young woman, clasped her hands.

"Ah, we know of that from Mr. Martin, too!" she cried. "What, Benjamin! and you have really sat and conferred with General Washington face to face?"

"He has, indeed!" put in Mercy, with a proud look at her lover, which was amply reflected in the faces of mother and sister.

"Besides," the widow hastened to say, "he need not apprehend such bad blood on the British naval folks' part by reason of his attempt on Traitor Arnold. Some of them secretly admire him for it, I am sure. Didn't Mr. Manners hint as much to you, Mary?" turning to her daughter.

"Yes," Mary replied, with a blush. "At all events, they think it was a bold, hardy deed. And the Britishers, rank and file, are still terribly wrought up over General Washington's hanging of Major André, their spy, you know. Mr. Manners says that they hold Arnold as in some measure responsible, and wouldn't be so cut to the heart if he might get his deserts, into the bargain."

Both Ben and Mercy had looked up with a start at the mention of Manners's name.

CHAPTER XIII.

LIGHTING THE FUSE.

"WHAT!" exclaimed Ben; "is it Mr. Passed-Midshipman Manners, sailing-master of the corvette, that you are speaking about?"

Mary blushed again.

"Yes; but he is a second lieutenant now," she replied, with a slight embarrassment. "Admiral Lord Howe, his own uncle, sent him his commission yesterday."

"But he was seriously wounded in his duel with Captain Scudder."

"No, only slightly, though it was rumored otherwise," interrupted Mrs. Harrup. "The young officer walks a little lame, but that is all."

It then came out that Manners had rejoined the corvette directly after the duel, and was already a frequent visitor at the cottage—with such effect upon Mary Harrup as could be best surmised by her occasional blush.

"Look here, this will never do!" cried Ben. "It is dangerous for you two to possess the secret of my plot, with that fellow visiting here, and doubtless making himself as agreeable as he knows how."

"You need not fear, Benjamin," replied Mary, bridling up a little. "I trust that mamma and I are patriotic above everything. Besides, Mr. Manners is not a fellow, but a perfect gentleman—Britisher though he be."

"Oh, I am not denying that he is a gentleman!" impatiently. "But look here, have either of you two any idea as to what his sword-play with Captain Scudder was about?"

"They had wrangled over cards, and were heated with wine," said Mary.

"Or perhaps the post-captain was jealous of Mr. Manners's too rapid promotion," suggested the widow.

Ben burst into a fierce laugh.

"Jealous, but not for such cause!" he cried. "And though both may have been more or less drunk—a common enough thing with these gold-laced chaps!—it was not over cards at all, but for sweetheart Mercy here, who cared not a pin for either of them, that they quarreled and fought, like the dandy, aristocratic bulldogs that they are."

"It is true," said Mercy, quietly. "Benjamin will tell you all about it."

And Benjamin did so, giving the disgraceful story without varnish.

"I shall never speak to Mr. Manners again!" exclaimed Mary Harrup, who had changed from red to pale a dozen times during the recital—she was as attractive a blonde as Mercy was as a brunette. "He—he is not truthful!" and she flounced out of the room.

Ben turned upon his mother.

"Why, you can't have known the fellow more than three days!" he exclaimed, greatly disturbed. "Can there be anything between them already?"

"No, no!" the widow hastened to say. "Mary is somewhat susceptible, while the young lieutenant is agreeable, you know. That is all."

"It had better be all!" said the young man, sternly. "Agreeable? Yes; and as corrupt, unprincipled a scoundrel as ever set foot ashore from a British man-o'-war! And as for Mary," his face darkened, "has she so soon forgotten honest Jack Blackwell already?"

"No, no; I am sure she hasn't. Only John has been away with the blue-fishing for some days; and, really, Benjamin, you should not be too hard on your sister. A pretty and lively girl like Molly may enjoy an occasional chat with a merry-minded young officer without seriousness."

But Ben continued disturbed. Much more was said by his mother, chiefly with the idea of disabusing him of his apprehensions of the security of his plot; while Mercy also promised that she would instill the requisite amount of caution into Mary's mind.

The Jack Blackwell who had been alluded to was a well-to-do young fisherman, with a smart smack of his own, who had long been a persistent suitor of Mary Harrup's, Ben having supposed up to this time that there might be even a secret betrothal between the pair.

"Well, well," said Ben, at last, "I suppose it will be all right. But, Mercy, my dear, do you continue to maintain your midshipman's rig for awhile. It may yet prove useful to us both."

He thereupon kissed her and his mother and hurried away to expedite his affairs.

He found that his sudden prestige in the vicinity had not been overestimated, and that his official recognition by General Washington himself proved a veritable tower of strength in the forwarding of his enterprise.

Even before the remainder of that day had worn away he had succeeded in enlisting a dozen picked men in the venture, while his confederates of the Mercy Lord were hardly less successful than he in their recruiting efforts.

"This is good work!" exclaimed Ben, when about to separate from Silas Martin and the others for the night. "At this rate we ought to have our complement of a hundred within three days at the furthest, together with those that Captain Joe Bunker has promised to bring along from Hackensack. Let us but lay the train well, and the only thing left will be to light the fuse."

This was at the rendezvous which had been chosen for the gathering, arming and instruction of the recruits.

It was in the wild heart of a dense wood at the head of a deep, narrow cove penetrating far into the land from Raritan Bay and not more than a mile from the center of the town.

A more lonely and secure place for the purpose in hand could scarcely have been chosen. Already the glen was assuming the air of an encampment, with camp-fires twinkling here and there; and, in addition to the Mercy Lord, which had been brought up several hours previously, several other craft were scattered here and there among the thick trees overreaching the narrow water-way.

"Yes," replied Silas, "nothing could be more encouraging."

"My pop is going to be one of us by to-morrow noon," spoke up Frank Percy, proudly. "He promised he would, and mommer she said she'd make him come if he tried to back out."

"Two of the men I raked in to-day," said Thomas Simmons, "will do some considerable drumming up on their own hook in a quiet way."

"I've got better news still," announced Miles Hobby. "There's half a regiment of the Jersey Blues reconnoitering within only a couple of miles of us."

"You are sure of that?" cried Ben, eagerly.

"Indeed I am, Captain Ben! for I talked with several of them who proved to be old cronies of mine. How would a shore attack from those chaps on such of the corvette's officers and men as are quartering in the town, while we are storming the ship itself, answer?"

"Splendidly!"

"Well, it can be arranged; I am certain of it. Absolute secrecy is all we require while bringing the thing to a head."

This remark aroused Ben's anxiety afresh, with regard to those visits of Manners to his mother's cottage.

He was about to set off for home when a trim fishing-smack was seen nosing her way slowly up the cove, amid the falling twilight shadows.

"By Jupiter!" he exclaimed, with a feeling of secret relief; "that ought to be Jack Blackwell's Sairy Ann, or I don't know a smack from a sea-turtle."

So it proved, and a moment later Blackwell himself, a fine, muscular specimen of the coast-wise sailor of that adventurous day, grasped his hand.

"I got wind of this thing only a few hours ago, Ben," said the new-comer, in a rich, deep voice, "and here I am. What, old messmate!"

you didn't think to leave me out of a deal like this, eh?"

"By no means, old fellow!" cried Ben, heartily. "It's only rejoiced I am you are back from the fishing in time."

He then drew his friend apart, impressed him with certain confidences, and hurried away, Blackwell likewise taking his departure in his smack, the Sairy Ann, a little later on.

When Ben reached his mother's garden gate, still before it was quite dark, he found Mercy Lord and his sister Mary conversing there.

He had already had his supper elsewhere, and was exchanging some words with them when he recognized a figure lurking watchfully among some roadside trees, a few yards distant.

"You two go into the cottage now, and I will rejoin you presently," he said, in a low voice. "Don't pause to ask questions; there is mischief abroad."

Mary looked at him with a puzzled air, but Mercy, who retained her masculine costume, was of quicker apprehension.

"Come!" she said, passing her arm through her companion's; "don't you hear the drunken songs being roared out from the tavern down yonder? It is doubtless that to which Benjamin refers."

And she led her into the house.

A moment later, as he had anticipated, Ben was joined by young Manners, whose figure it was that he had noticed on the watch.

CHAPTER XIV.

SPRINGING THE MINE.

THE elegant young Britisher walked with a perceptible limp, as the result of his recent wound.

But, he was looking especially spruce in his brand-new lieutenant's uniform, which was fairly agleam with gold lace and ornamental froggings, and he was as handsome, Lothario-like and overbearing as ever, though just now in a somewhat amiable vein.

"Aha, Barnacle Ben!" said he, with a smile. "So we meet again, eh?"

"So it seems, Mr. Lieutenant," replied Ben, who had hastily put on his slouching hobbled-hoy air. "And after some stirring adventures, too. Haw, haw, haw!"

"That is true. However, don't think I take any stock in that yarn abroad in your having had any concern in the attempt on General Arnold, to say nothing of your having bossed the enterprise."

"Haw, haw, haw! I should say you wouldn't, sir. The idee! Howsomever, I might have had, maybe," perking up. "For, you see, I'm no fool." And he winked his eye with a bumpkin-like assumption of superior intelligence.

"Yes, yes, of course. But that's all over and done now; and if you lost your master by that bad night's work, I was well pirked in the thigh for my conceitedness, which ought to make us cry quits."

"Oh, Jerusalem! that's all right, Mr. Lieutenant."

"By the way, perhaps the young lady, Mistress Mary Harrup, whose acquaintance I've had the honor of making while here, may be some relative of yours?"

"Haw, haw, haw! not much of a relation—only my sister, that's all. Haw, haw, haw!"

"Ha, ha! pretty good joke—for you, Barnacle. However, you're to be congratulated. Any man might be proud to be brother, or something else—to such an attractive young girl."

"Thankee, sir!" evidently in high glee. "Yes, siree! there ben't many of the gals hereabouts what kin take the wind out of our Molly's sails for good looks, I reckon."

"True enough! But the other young lady—or, I beg pardon, the young sailor lad in the middy's rig—who was chatting here with your sister a few moments ago?" And Manners gazed into the other's eyes with a mocking look that showed plainly enough that he had penetrated Mercy's identity, probably at a glance.

"Oh, that chap!" faltered Ben, with an excellent pretension of pretending an embarrassment.

"Exactly."

"Well, Mr. Lieutenant, he's—he's a young feller what's a friend of our family, you know."

Manners burst into his careless laugh, and then slapped him on the shoulder.

"What, you rogue!" he laughed; "do you know that I suspect you are not quite the simpleton you look?"

"But what kin you mean, Mr. Lieutenant?"

"Tut, tut! As if any other course were left the poor young mistress after losing her father and home at one fell swoop! My heart fairly aches for her. But how did she manage to give Scudder the go-by, I wonder? Blast his top-lights! if all's fair in love and war, I may yet crow over him in a way to even up that thigh-thrust he gave me—though, to be sure, he won't whistle in tune again with that hole in his cheek from my sword-point. Look you, my lad!" And he laid his hand pleasantly on the other's shoulder while looking down searching into his eyes.

"Holy mackerel, but this is awful!" stammered Ben, apparently disconcerted to the last.

degree. "But what would you have of me, Mr. Lieutenant?"

"Look!" dangling a well-filled purse before the other's eyes till its contents jingled suggestively, "you remember the coin I forked over to you?"

"Well, I should say so!"

"There are a dozen coins in this purse, and they are not silver but gold—gold guineas! Do you mind?"

"Jehosiphat! do you mean it?"

"Sure as you're born!"

"Guineas—real guineas?"

"On my honor! and the entire purse of them is yours if you'll bring that same—smart sailor lad to meet me at the water's edge, just this side the long dock at which our corvette is moored, one hour hence."

"Sho! You can't mean it?"

"On a gentleman's honor!"

"But you must mean my sister Molly?"

"Not I, but the sailor lad who was with her anon."

"Pay me in advance, and I'll do it!" was the enthusiastic response.

Manners hesitated.

"A doz'n guineas are a large sum! How shall I trust you?"

"On the honor of—of a man!"

The young officer laughed, and then thrust the purse into Ben's hand.

"Good! I'll trust you, win or lose."

"And win or lose, Mr. Lieutenant, I swear that I'll keep my word—to the letter!"

"Remember—an hour hence!" and with that Manners darted off into the darkness, saying to himself as he did so, "I'll marry Mercy Lord off-hand, as soon as I can drum up a parson to tie the knot, let my connections howl as they may; then, my bold Cousin Scudder, whistle me down the wind if the hole in your cheek will let you!"

Ben waited till he was well gone, and then, going down to the bay shore near at hand, he signaled to a fishing-smack that was gliding along lazily from the direction of Deep Cove, as the reach was called which backed up into the recruiting rendezvous.

It came a little nearer, and after exchanging a few words with a man in the bow, Ben returned to the cottage, while the smack quietly proceeded on her way.

An hour hence, accompanied by both his sweetheart and his sister, Barnacle Ben proceeded in the direction of the tryst appointed by the young lieutenant, avoiding the more populous part of the village, which was still noisy with the jollifications of the men from the corvette, and keeping along the water as continuously as was practicable.

Mary Harrup was enveloped from head to foot in a voluminous wrap, while Mercy was still in her middy's dress.

When nearing the dock, Ben posted his sister in a convenient place of observation, and then advanced hesitatingly with his remaining companion to a softly star-lighted spot on the beach near at hand where the slender figure of the amorous lieutenant was discerned in waiting.

"Here is the young man, Mr. Lieutenant," he said. "Have I kept my word and earned the guineas?"

"You have, you have!" And, heedless of his presence, Manners was at Mercy's side at a single bound. "Mistress Mercy, did you think to fool me with this disguise?" he exclaimed, "Ah, but the love I bear for thee would penetrate a thousand such shams, divinely fascinating as you appear in this one!"

"Sir, sir!" faltered Mercy, simulating a confusion she was far from feeling. "What encouragement have I ever given you for such words? What—"

But he interrupted her with a perfect torrent of protestations and avowals too numerous and incoherent for reproduction.

"Listen, my darling, listen!" he exclaimed, at last. "My family are noble, and yet I love you honorably, absolutely. Fly with me! Any parson in the vicinity can make us one in no time. After that I shall get a furlough and carry you back to England with me as my blushing bride. Your beauty will grace my mother's palace home to which I will lead you. In the mean time we can have our honeymoon on the corvette. Say the word, my precious! A boat, with two sailors sworn to secrecy, is just around the sand-spit yonder. Oh, my darling, my love! do not refuse me. My love, my name, my fortune are henceforth absolutely yours!"

"Wild words these, Mr. Manners," returned Mercy, quietly. "But, perhaps Mary Harrup found them pleasanter than I do when you rehearsed them for her benefit, as I am told you did, only a night or two ago."

"I? That silly, conceited girl, with her blonde doll's face, her ridiculous yellow curls and China-blue eyes! A graceless gawk, a bread-and-butter miss! False, false, false! Who could have cheated you with such a yarn, Mercy? By my hopes of salvation! if there is any other girl I ever made love to but your self—"

"Thanks for your gentlemanly compliments,

Mr. Manners!" exclaimed a cold voice, and Mary Harrup disclosed herself. "Your politeness is on a par with your truthfulness, which is simply what is called in our country mathematics an unknown quantity."

The young officer started back in momentary consternation.

He might have recovered with his accustomed audacity, but just then there was heard the sharp grating of a keel upon the sand, and three men armed with belaying-pins and headed by Jack Blackwell sprung out of the Sairy Ann, precipitating themselves upon him with such suddenness that he was thrown down and bound before he could so much as draw his sword.

One outcry which he made brought his two sailors to the rescue with a run, when they were speedily knocked senseless.

"Scoundrels!" roared Manners; "how dare you?"

The next instant he was gagged, then the three captives were tumbled into the smack, which was put off, and away she scudded out into the bay.

"Yankee sailors dare many things, Mr. Manners!" were Mary Harrup's taunting last words in the trapped lieutenant's ears as he was being thus spirited away. "It is easier with them than making love to two girls at the same time."

Nevertheless, there was a despairing bitterness in her voice, for, in spite of her craving for admiration, Molly's heart had long since passed irrecoverably into Jack Blackwell's keeping, and he had not so much as looked at her during the touch-and-go ruse that had been so cleverly executed.

Ben and the young women returned to the cottage without the exchange of a word, the former remaining at the gate while his companions passed into the house.

Mercy rejoined him a few minutes later, and gently took his hand.

"It was a bitter lesson for her, Benjamin," she said. "But she is that far cured of her folly that there is no longer any danger of our secret slipping out among Red-coat understrappers."

"Thank Heaven for that!" and Ben kissed her tenderly. "With our plot intact, there can be little further question as to its success. The train is laid, the fuse is sizzling, and the next development, let us hope, shall be the springing of the mine."

CHAPTER XV.

THE BATTLE-TEST.

THERE was yet another thing that tended to hasten Ben's plot for the capture of the corvette.

This was his good mother's decided and sensible opposition to Mercy Lord becoming his wife until after something definite had developed as to the young man's success in the world.

"Capture your ship, launch your privateer, and see what comes of it," she said. "You can think of marrying this dear, orphaned girl afterward. But to do so beforehand would be the height of folly and madness, to say nothing of the indecency of such a step, in view of the recentness of her bereavement. I will not countenance it for an instant, Benjamin. Should you neglect my advice, you might be compelled to live on your young wife's money—for you know how poor we are, and I know how you might be tempted to a long period of inglorious ease by the attractions which Mercy as your bride would be apt to hold out to you—and surely you would not risk being charged with such a meanness as that."

Very excellent advice this was. And it was perhaps well for his future career that our young adventurer decided to abide by it. As for Mercy, she saw its wisdom at once, and with such force that she only wondered she could ever have entertained the hastier course which the lovers had at first decided to adopt.

"I shall live here with your good mother and your dear sister, my love," she had said, "and our lives for the most part shall be nothing more than eyes with which to watch your career. But we must not think of marrying until the war is over and the independence of our country achieved. This will be for the best."

Ben had acquiesced at last, though not without some misgivings as to what Captain Scudder, of the Bellerophon, might next essay with regard to recovering possession of the young girl when he, her lover, might be far away, and no longer able to protect her. As for Lieutenant Manners, he regarded him sufficiently disposed of as to be thenceforward out of consideration, though that was all he knew about that young gentleman's energy and persistency of purpose.

However, having fairly accepted the changed situation in his affair of the heart, he was all the more ready to push forward the adventurous business which he had under way with the utmost vigor and dispatch.

A number of fortunate circumstances contributed to this end.

In the first place, one-legged Captain Joe Bumper was enabled to put in an appearance at

the rendezvous with his recruits from Hackensack three days before the day agreed on.

Then the recruiting went on with such unexpected briskness in the more immediate vicinity that, at about the time of this arrival, Barnacle Ben found himself at the head of a hundred and thirty men. Many of these were veterans, and the majority were not new to sea service, while fully a quarter of the number were able-bodied seamen. About half were well armed, with firelocks, swords or hangers of their own, and the remainder indifferently so. Still it was more than large enough a force for the work in hand, and the task of feeding such a body of men on the game (fortunately plentiful at this season of the year) and foraging of the vicinity, while at the same time keeping their presence a secret from the British sailors and marines swarming daily through the town and outlying villages, became hourly more problematic.

However, just about this time it became known that the corvette had received instructions to put to sea on the following day, her repairs and provisioning having been about completed; and it was presumed that the last night on shore would be celebrated by a parting jollification, perhaps of unusual indulgence on the part of the officers and men.

This night, therefore—the fifth after Ben's arrival at his mother's cottage with Mercy Lord—was accordingly fixed upon for the attack.

Colonel Forceman, commanding the detachment of the New Jersey Blues, two miles back, near a place called Colt's Neck, was communicated with, and promised to make his attack on such of the Britishers as should be in the town at nine o'clock, at which hour it was shrewdly guessed the farewell festivities would be at their height.

Their attack was to be the signal for Ben's force to move out over the water to attack the corvette in two detachments, one out of Deep Cove, under his own immediate command, the other out of Raritan River, which would be directed by Silas, his chief lieutenant.

The Champion was by this time fully ready for sea, and anchored in the Sound midway between Perth Amboy and Tottenville, on Staten Island, with the little settlement of South Amboy, then but a small collection of log houses on the south, and just off the Point, as it is called, the long narrow spit of sand between Perth Amboy Harbor and the outer bay.

In addition to the Champion, a small British gunboat, the Spitfire, of four guns and fifty men, occupied an anchorage about a mile to the north, but little attention was given to her on the assumption that the test of battle would doubtless be decided so promptly, one way or another, on board the corvette as to render any subsequent interference on the part of the gunboat of very little moment.

When the hour arrived, all preparations on the part of the assailants were complete, while the entire town was aroar with the carousing tars and their officers, who had even built great bonfires in the streets that they might enjoy their saturnalia to the full.

At last there came the shots as the signal that the Blues were rushing in upon the revelers, and Barnacle Ben fired an improvised rocket to signal the combined water attack.

His little flotilla, composed of the Mercy Lord, the Sairy Ann and seven other smacks, carrying seventy men, swept out of Deep Cove with the ebb tide in its favor, and, with a favoring light wind from the west, bore straight down upon the corvette with the directness of an arrow.

At this juncture, his immediate second in command, Miles Hobby, who was on the last smack of the line, rowed across the intervening space in a small boat and sprung over the rail of the Mercy Lord in which Skipper Ben had taken up his quarters in the van.

"Bad luck!" he whispered; "though I do not fear for its effect on the general result."

"What is it?" demanded the young commander, quickly.

"Lieutenant escaped from his confinement twenty minutes ago, and is doubtless carrying the alarm with him at the top of his speed. Old Bumper only just now informed me of it."

Ben's brow clouded, and then he shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"Look yonder!" He pointed across the Point, to where the outlines of the second flotilla could be seen sweeping out in a serried parallel line with their own. "The escaped rascal's warning will come rather late to be of utility, I fancy."

But sixty men had been left on the corvette, and these seemed scarcely aware of the attack, till Ben Harrup's flotilla was almost upon them.

Then lighting the signal basket fire, they sprang to their guns, but, too late!

"Hurrah!" yelled the would-be privateersman, springing forward, sword in hand, as the sloop achieved the honor of first crashing against the big ship's side. "Liberty and the American flag forever!"

He had never been with a boarding party before, but his veins stretched to bursting with the fierce heat of battle.

Then, the young patriotic skipper led the first onslaught over the corvette's rail!

CHAPTER XVI.

VICTORY.

BUT sixty veteran British men-o'-war's men, than whom there are no braver men in the world, never yet failed to make a valiant resistance against double their number of comparatively poorly-armed, indifferently-disciplined assailants, and these that had been left on board the corvette were led by a lieutenant and three midshipmen who had been in many a desperate sea-fight at home and abroad.

Taken by surprise as they had been, they at once rallied, and immediately the starboard 'midships, on which the initial assault had been made, were the scene of as desperate a hand-to-hand fight as can well be imagined.

Thus far the contestants were on a pretty close equality as to numbers, and after their first onset the ill-disciplined boarders began to give way, in spite of all but frantic attempts of Barnacle Ben and Miles Hobby to encourage them to their work.

"Cut 'em down! pitch 'em to the sharks!" roared the British lieutenant, a crabbed old sea-dog, laying about him with his sword as vigorously as a recent attack of the gout would admit. "What are they, anyway, but Rebel curs and land-lubber vermin? A mere mob of—"

"Same respects to you, my hearty!" bawling interrupted old Bumper, at the same instant dropping him dead in his tracks with a lucky shot between the eyes.

Then he slipped in a pool of blood and went down himself, back-first, with his wooden leg kicking oddly in the air, while the elder of the midshipmen was likewise brought to the deck by the thrust of a scythe-blade lashed to the end of a stout hoop-pole, which all but disemboweled him.

"Hurrah!" shouted Barnacle Ben, crossing swords with another of the middies; "hold your own for five minutes, boys—that will be enough."

The boarders made a last desperate stand at the rail, but the five minutes were not required of them.

At this juncture there was a crash on the corvette's larboard 'midships, and then the adventurers of the second flotilla, under Martin's command, poured along the doomed deck from that side, with waving weapons and blood-thirsty cries.

Then the astounded defenders became absolutely panic-stricken, and what ensued was less a struggle than a slaughter.

Five minutes after the second attack, and not more than ten after the first, the corvette was in the undisputed possession of the Americans.

Of the brave Britishers who had defended her but nine were left alive, and they for the most part wounded to the death.

The victory was complete.

A little later on when the vessel's new crew had been in some measure organized and Barnacle Ben was directing the prize to be worn inshore that the result of the shore attack could be ascertained, Uncle Joe Bumper came hopping aft to where he was standing in an odd plight.

His wooden leg had come off its stump in the struggle, and he was brandishing it wildly over his head with one hand, while in the other he flourished a flask of his beloved apple-jack, with which he seemed to be already exhilarated, as he spryly hopped along on his one serviceable leg.

But the first words that issued from the old fellow's lips were the reverse of what might have been expected.

"Are you bound to be caught napping even in the hour of victory, Captain Ben?" he shouted. "Look north-away, man!"

Miles Hobby was the first to wheel in the direction indicated.

"By Heaven!" he exclaimed; "it's the little Spitfire, and she's almost onto us!"

It was true, and at that instant the gunboat's bow-gun let fly, the ball knocking a fairish splinter out of the corvette's taffrail, which brained an unfortunate fellow in its nearest proximity.

At the same time, or directly following upon the shot, a voice—Lieutenant Manners's voice—was roared from the Spitfire's catheads.

"Barnacle Ben, you infernal hypocrite!" this, interlarded with a string of nautical profanity; "I'll be even with you yet, and have pretty Mercy into the bargain. Lunkhead! you'll find it's one thing for a mob of land-eels to capture a ship, and another thing for 'em to man her guns. I intend to blow you out of the water inside of three minutes."

"We'll see about that, Mr. Gold-Lace-and-Cocked-Hat," replied Ben, quietly, he having already given the necessary orders. "Mr. Hobby, are those selected gunners ready with that broadside?"

"All in readiness, Captain Ben."

"Wear ship a little more. That will do. Mr. Martin, give the order to fire."

This was done, and the first broadside of the corvette under her new masters—and with picked veterans from among them to serve it—was thundered out.

The star of fortune was still with the Americans.

The range was so short and the collective aim so true that the entire broadside caught the gun-

boat flush in the starboard bow and on a dead level with her water-line.

There was a ringing cheer from the Americans, and a chorus of execrations from the Spitfire, which had almost instantly pitched forward, with the sea-water rushing like a river into the breach.

Here Frank Percy came running aft.

"If you please, Mr. Harrup," he cried, "one of the wounded Britishers says as how there's thirty American men-o'-war'smen prisoners on board the gunboat."

"Boats out!" shouted Barnacle Ben. "We'll save those prisoners, or die in the attempt."

As the rescuing boats put off from the corvette, two were perceived to quit the sinking Spitfire, and rapidly make for the shore, crowded with men.

When the wreck was boarded, it was found that the prisoners had been heartlessly left to their fate in the vessel's strong-room, with hatches battened down.

All were saved just in the nick of time, the gunboat going down out of sight with a sullen plunge a few minutes after the boats had pushed clear.

Then a boat was sent ashore to inquire into the results of the scrimmage in that direction.

Here a semi-disappointment was in store for the brave captors of the corvette.

The Jersey Blues, though having everything their own way at the outset, the surprise of the carousing sailors having been complete, had been very badly thereafter.

At all events, after driving the enemy along the shore for a short distance and killing a few of them, many of the ragged patriots had surrendered to the temptation of getting drunk on the liquor left behind.

This had so completely demoralized the Blues that, though they were left in possession of the town, the British had fortified themselves, after suffering some trifling losses, further up the shore at a point whence their fleet in New York Harbor could readily be communicated with.

One of the officers of the Blues, indeed, had the hardihood to take a boat to the corvette.

He was in a vain-glorious condition of intoxication, and actually seemed to think that her masterly capture was mainly due to the shore operations of himself and his demoralized troopers.

"Oh, but we gave 'em fits, cap'n!" he exclaimed, flourishing a bottle of captured whisky in one hand and slapping his sword-hilt with the other. "What u'd you have done without us, hey? Gad! we're the boys, ole fellow!"

"I've no doubt you are great heroes—when you are sober," replied Barnacle Ben, disgustedly. "But we've no use for you on this ship, and the sooner you get out of it the better it will be for you."

But at this point old Captain Bumper, who had managed to buckle his wooden leg in place again, gravely confiscated the officer's bottle of whisky and led him away by the ear.

"The gentleman's completely upset, Captain Ben," said he. "But I shall have to send him back to shore with such a flea in his ear that his understandings may be enlivened not inconsiderably."

This he accordingly did, but only to show up himself a little later on in a decidedly worse state of intoxication than that which he had so sagely reproved.

But Barnacle Ben was in a natural condition of exultation in which much could be overlooked and forgiven.

On the water the Americans had made a clean sweep of everything, with a loss of but four men slain and seven wounded out of their entire number.

Before morning dawned the corvette, which had been in perfect sailing order at the moment of her capture, was cleansed of the last traces of the sanguinary fight.

The wounded and prisoners had been removed to shore, her officers and crew were thoroughly organized, and she was in readiness for her maiden voyage under the new flag with a complement of one hundred and seventy-five men, including the seamen who had been rescued from the Spitfire, every one of whom was a thorough-paced man of-war's-man.

Then a boat was sent ashore for the ladies of the young captain's household, and the christening of the new American sea-fighter was in order.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SEA SCOUT.

AN hour after daylight, and in the presence of a large concourse of folk from the surrounding villages and country-sides, who fairly covered the surface of the inner bay in boats of various descriptions, while the adjoining shores were black with gazers, the ceremony was executed.

A salvo was fired, the American flag was run up to the gaff, and then, as the noble prize began to round the Point on her way down the outer bay under a light press of sail, to the rolling of drums and shrieking of fifes, Mercy Lord stepped forward to the bow as the presiding genius of the occasion.

The midshipman's masquerade had been dis-

carded, never, as she declared, to be resumed again.

She was now dressed in white, with red and blue favors, and looked inexpressibly beautiful as she stood out on the heel of the bowsprit at her brave lover's side, her dark cheeks flushing, the bottle of spirits with which she was to perform the ceremony in her hand.

Captain Ben lifted his hand, and a momentary hush fell upon the expectant multitude.

Then Mercy cast the bottle deftly so that it burst against the corvette's figure-head, calling out, in a clear, sweet voice, as had been arranged beforehand:

"I name thee anew the SEA SCOUT, and may thy course be henceforth conquering and triumphant in the cause of the free Confederate States of America, a blessing to our country's friends and well-wishers, a terror to her foes!"

Then the shouts went up afresh, the music pealed forth again, fresh canvas was shaken out from the towering masts, and the Sea Scout privateer was set for the open sea upon her initial voyage.

The ladies, together with such as had been appointed his chief officers, were for a brief period the young captain's guests in the cabin saloon.

Then the time for the former to be put ashore was come, and for a few moments Barnacle Ben was alone with his mother, sister and sweetheart, to say good-by.

"Of course," the young man explained, "we must get outside of Sandy Hook as soon as possible, in order to avoid the fleet of war-ships that will doubtless be sent after us on the jump as soon as the news of these doings reaches New York. But our opening cruise must be a short one, and I hope when we next meet to have my letter-of-marque commission from the Congress in my pocket, and perhaps some prize-money besides."

"But, oh, Benjamin!" exclaimed Mercy, anxiously; "are there not war-ships outside the Hook already whose blockade you will have to pierce?"

"As a matter of course, sweetheart," with a laugh. But the open sea is a wide field, and you mustn't forget that the Sea Scout is one of the champion sailors of the world. And yet she will never turn tail on a fighter of anything like her own strength, I can promise you."

"You are a great man, Benjamin, already," said his mother, "but I hope you will not forget to read your Bible every day. Here is one that I have brought you."

"That is lucky, my dear mother," replied Ben, accepting the book, "for I doubt if there is another one on the ship. Oh, yes! I'll try to remember my Bible."

Mary said nothing, and remained silent and sad.

When the time for parting kisses was come she felt sick at heart, for Jack Blackwell, who had been appointed boatswain, had not yet so much as looked at her.

But as they were stepping over the side, she being the last of the trio, she heard her name softly pronounced, and there he was at her side.

"Oh, Jack!" sobbed the girl, "I was breaking my heart with the thought that you were not going to notice me. And, indeed, I don't deserve that you should."

He held out his strong hand, with nothing but kindness and forgiveness in his bronzed, handsome face.

"Nonsense, lass!" he said. "Let bygones be bygones, and I am your lover still. Good-by!"

Then she was in his arms, with the flower of his farewell kiss upon her pretty lips.

Mercy had slipped a piece of paper in her lover's hand at the time of exchanging the parting kiss with him, and the last glimpse that he had of her face turned up to him from the smack that was bearing her back to the shore showed him that it was very pale and serious.

As soon as he could find himself alone again he glanced at the paper, which contained these words:

DEAR LOVE:

"In these last hours, which ought to be full of exultation for me no less than for you. I am oppressed with forebodings of future ill, not for you, but for myself. Promise me just this: That however circumstances may be made to appear against me, you will remain unwavering in your trust in my fidelity and love."

M. L."

"What can this mean?" thought the young man. "Why, she has nothing to fear, unless it should be from the continued pursuit of one or another of those love-sick poppycocks, Scudder or Manners; and it doesn't seem to me that she need to be under further apprehensions on that score. Ah! it is nothing more than a depression of spirits natural to the parting that was imminent between us."

Then he forgot all about the matter in the whirl of his new duties, though the time was surely to come when those sad-written words of his sweetheart would recur to him with a new force and significance.

As the Sea Scout began to round Sandy Hook, with as yet not a sail in sight, barring that of a fishing-smack or two, Ben sat in his cabin saloon in earnest conference with the men whom, after

due deliberation and much secret anxiety, he had constituted his chief subordinate officers.

These were Silas Martin, as first mate, and Miles Hobby and Thomas Simmons, as second and third mates respectively.

To the present conference were added Jack Blackwell, boatswain; Uncle Joe Bumper, boatswain's mate; and Dennis Rafferty, an old man-of-war's-man from among the released prisoners of the Spitfire, who had been selected as chief gunner.

It may be mentioned in passing that both Vanderspiegel and Anak had been added to the corvette's crew, though neither had taken part in the capture, the former as cabin steward, the latter as chief galley cook.

Old Bumper bade fair to be something of a discordant element.

In the first place, he had grumbled not a little at not having been made the second in command, which, indeed, he might have been—for he was no less an experienced navigator than a brave man—but for his disability, together with his fondness for the bottle. And in the next place, he had seemed disposed to presume generally upon his blood-relationship with the commander, which Barnacle Ben had suppressed summarily enough and on the instant; though not without some apprehensions as to trouble with the old fellow in the future.

Captain Ben now opened the conference with a short speech, in which, after modestly confessing to his youth and comparative inexperience, he had plainly stated his plan of cruise, which was to scour the coast as far as the Indies, and then return in the ensuing spring for the regular commission which might by that time be expected of the Congress.

Every one present cordially indorsed this plan as probably the best one that could be devised, until suddenly "Captain" Joe Bumper struck the table with his horny old fist, and cried out, raspingly:

"I object, by jingo!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

SAIL HO!

EVERYBODY looked up in surprise, while Barnacle Ben said, quietly:

"What do you especially object to, Uncle Joe?"

"That's it!" cried Bumper, with a smile and a sneer—and he chanced to be sober, too. "Oh, yes! you can 'Uncle Joe' me, an' soft-sawder me, and all that, an' me nothin' more than a pitiful, slab-sided, one-legged boatswain's mate!"

"There's nothing pitiful about the office," said Captain Ben sternly. "And if you don't like it, Mr. Bumper, you can—you can go as Mr. Rafferty's assistant; that is, if he wants one."

"Don't want him!" snapped out the gunner, who was an Irishman of few words. "Divil a bit, your Honor! Two legs ain't always enough on the gun-deck."

"I've got two as good legs as you, sir!" roared Bumper, kicking up his stump into full view. "One of 'em's wood, to be sure, but it's a daisy!"

With that, there being no bibulous refreshment yet in sight, he ostentatiously pulled out a flask and took a pull from it.

"Keep your temper, my friend," advised his superior officer, Boatswain Jack Blackwell, with some impatience. "Boatswain's mate is a berth not to be sneezed at in any first-class fighting ship."

"But Mr. Bumper hasn't yet told us what he objects to," interposed the Sea Scout's skipper.

"I object to everything!" shouted the old grumbler, obstreperously.

"It's not too late to put you ashore, then, if you like," coolly. "You have doubtless valuable qualities, Uncle Joe, which we may regret the loss of; but a chronic growler is better out of the Sea Scout than in."

"I don't want to be put ashore," objected the objector, slightly lowering his tone, and taking another lone nip at his flask. "'Pears to me I did a leetle toward capturing this 'ere prize, Barnacle Ben."

There was no denying the truth of this plea.

"We're none of us disposed to be ungrateful, Uncle Joe," said he. "Only if you are dissatisfied with your berth, you should state your reasons."

"Oh, I ain't growling 'bout that! Boatswain's mate's good enough fur a poor, miserable, one-legged old horse marine such as me, I suppose!" sarcastically.

"Then what is your objection? You must specify it."

"Well, sir," and Bumper again brought his fist down on the table amid a general grin, "there ain't style enough to suit me!"

"Style?"

"Yes, siree, all the time, sink or swim, now an' forever, an' six fur a shillin', till the angel Gabe blows his last fog-horn! And that's me!"

"But what sort of style would you recommend?"

"Well, sir, in the war-ships I've heretofor'd sailed in, there weren't no skipper, nor fu'st mate, second mate nor third mate, an' all that cheap sort of merchant-service swash, without uniforms, gold bob nor sword-sash among 'em," contemptuously. "No, siree! But there was

a captain commandin' an' his lieutenants, to say nothink of the midshipmen, all holly-stunned to perfection, an' with that much gold lace an' spangles as would make fo'castle eyes jest ache to look at 'em. There you are, my hearty!"

"Oho! so that is your idea, is it? Well, you'll get nothing of the sort here. The Sea Scout is to be a letter-of-marque privateer, pure and simple, with plenty of fighting talent on board, but with not enough gimcracking quarter-deck dazzle to widen the eyes of a Hottentot. There you are, Mr. Bumper, and don't you forget it in the future!"

There was an applauding voice from every one present, save the champion grumbler himself, who sadly took a last pull at his flask, turned it upside down without eliciting a last lingering drop, and finally bowed his grizzled head in a crushed, subdued way.

"I give in!" he sighed, mournfully. "Holy Beeswax! eff there ain't a-going to be no more style than that, why—I—Gentlemen, I accepts the situation, an' chaws the cud of humanity from this time for'ard."

"This is as it should be!" cried Barnacle Ben, good-humoredly. "Steward, set out something to drink; and we'll have a bumper all round to the first voyage of the Sea Scout."

Van, who had been standing solemnly in a corner of the saloon, looking as grave as a Chinese mandarin in his rotundity, bestirred himself accordingly.

"Dere's plenty of goot stuff on poard der Zee Scoud!" said he, phlegmatically, as he set out bottles and glasses. "Doze Pritishers must have lived like birates v'en dey did live, it zeems to me."

The wine proved to be an excellent brand of Burgundy, but scarcely had the proposed bumper been tossed off when the words "Sail ho!" shouted down the companionway brought every man to his feet in a general rush for the deck.

Old Bumper contrived to linger a little, with his fishy old eyes cast longingly toward the just-sampled bottles.

"Ahem! Mr. Steward," he began, "when good liquor is sort o' standin' to waste, an' fellers' gullets is sort of dry—"

Here the Dutchman plumped his huge frame solidly between the veteran and the festive view, with the expressive words:

"I ton'd undersdand nuttings eggzept v'en der virst-cabin ovvizers ish ordering t'ings."

Bumper scowled at him, and then stumped his way out of the saloon without another word.

The Sea Scout was now well off the Hook, headed for blue water.

The sail that had been sighted was dimly descried against the northeast horizon.

"A frigate, I'm thinking," observed Captain Ben, after a long look through his telescope. "What do you make of her, Mr. Martin?"

"I'm of your opinion, sir," was the first mate's reply. "But then my eyes aren't what they used to be."

They both turned to Miles Hobby, the second officer, on whose rare nautical judgment they had already learned to rely, and who was also leveling his glass at the stranger.

"A three-decker, in my opinion," Miles announced, after a pause. "Her royals are specially high for anything smaller, and she makes a big blot on the sea-wall considering the distance."

Here "Sail ho!" was again sung out, this time from the fore-top cross-trees.

"Whereaway?" called out Ben.

"Southeast by south," was the response. "Wait till that rain-cloud lifts—she isn't five miles away. There she looms!"

Sure enough, as soon as the cloud in question drifted away, a ship making for the Hook under full sail was disclosed.

"A sloop-of-war!" exclaimed Miles Hobby, almost on the instant.

Rafferty, the gunner, came aft to the edge of the poop, and touched his hat.

"What is it, Mr. Rafferty?" inquired Captain Ben.

"If ye pl'aze, sor," was the grinning reply, "Oi know that ship."

"What is she?"

"The sloop-o'-war Termagant, sor. She an' the corvette Champion as was used to be companion cruisers on the French Coast, an' the officers was the best of cronies when ashore."

"Good! Thank you, Mr. Rafferty."

"Moight I suggest something to your Honor?"

"Of course you may."

"It's this, may it pl'aze your Honor: that the divils on the Termagant very loikely mistake us for their owld fri'nds, the divils on the Champion—do yez moind?—an' are afther passing the toime o'day wid us for owld acquaintance's sake, an' belikes to crack a bothle o' wine to the success o' King George's arrums—bad 'cess to him jist the same!"

"A good idea, Mr. Rafferty! Thank you for the suggestion."

The shrewd Irishman's guess proved to have hit the mark.

"I know the Termagant fairly well," said Miles Hobby, when the sloop had come within a couple of miles. "She's a slow sailer, that we

can dance about like a cooper around a hog's head, but almost a frigate in class, with thirty-two guns and a usual complement of two hundred and fifty men."

"Good enough! we'll not display any colors till she speaks us, and then give her a surprise to remember us by, if nothing worse."

The Sea Scout's armament consisted of her broadsides of sixteen twenty-four pounders, with bow and stern chasers, thirty-two pounders, the latter of brass and somewhat noted as an exceptional piece of ordnance.

Everything was quietly got in readiness for action, and by the time the Termagant had approached within hail, four sail had loomed up in the horizon behind her, indicating that she was convoying in as many store-ships or transports.

By this time, likewise, the great three-decker first sighted had loomed up sufficiently to betray her impressive and formidable character, but was still too far away to be taken into consideration for what might be on the point of happening.

"Corvette ahoy!" was at last shouted from the quarter-deck of the sloop, which was seen to be ablaze with brilliant uniforms, while her jacks-tars were crowded listlessly along the spar-deck, or even peeping out from the cross-trees.

A light but steady breeze was blowing from the west, and the corvette, with all sails set, was answering to her rudder like a winged thing.

"Ease her a little closer, Mr. Martin," said Captain Ben, "and then be ready to sheer out when I get ready to order the broadside. Mr. Simmons, stand by with the colors. Mr. Hobby, keep your eye on the gunner in readiness for the word."

Then, springing to the taffrail, the vessels by this time being not more than six cable-lengths apart, he waved his hat and shouted the return salutation:

"Sloop-of-war Termagant ahoy!"

The chief officer on the sloop seemed to be already puzzled.

"Why don't you fly your Union Jack?" he at last shouted again.

"We don't carry a rag of that sort!" was the response.

Instantly there was a confused clustering of uniforms on the other's poop-deck, where the strangeness of there being no similar display on board the corvette had doubtless already caused no little comment.

At last the Termagant's captain bawled out:

"Who in thunder are you, anyway?"

"The corvette Champion that was—the Yankee privateer Sea Scout that is!" was the taunting response.

Simultaneously with this, the Stars and Stripes were rushed up to the Sea Scout's gaff, her fifer and drummer pealed out Yankee Doodle, and, in electric obedience to the order, her broadside was poured into the sloop amidships with tremendous effect.

Then she wore out like a duck, and before the panic-stricken enemy had more than got over their first shock of panic, her long glistening stern-chaser sent in a thirty-two pound bolt-of-war that raked the Termagant fore and aft.

But the latter was no tyro at the terrible game of iron hail.

The wind's shifting a point in her favor, she would in a few moments have been able to reply with her port broadside, had not the Sea Scout filled away before the freshening breeze.

"That will do as a sample of our mettle!" cried Captain Ben, while a cheer went up around. "Give her a parting dose from the Long Tom, Mr. Rafferty, and then we'll see what those transports to leeward are made of in the way of prize-money."

CHAPTER XIX.

"WHITE WINGS"

THIS was accordingly done, and after that the Sea Scout by her superior sailing rapidly left her crippled enemy behind.

Had it not been for the approach of the three-decker, Ben would have willingly hazarded a pitched battle with the Termagant, notwithstanding the latter's superiority in size and armament, but as it was he had occasion to congratulate himself on having fished his maiden sword in the trade of privateering so nobly.

All sail was now cracked on for the presumable transports in the southeast.

But these had already taken the alarm, scattering like a flurry of white wings from under the gyrfalcon's bolt-like swoop, and darkness shut down over that first day of the Sea Scout in blue water, with only guess-work by which to track down the prizes in prospect.

At moon-rise, however, two sail were once more sighted off the weather-bow, and this was deemed as sufficiently encouraging, though no effort was made for more than keeping them located for the time being.

However, man proposes and God disposes from the beginning to the end.

At midnight a fierce squall, lasting several hours, sprung up from the north.

Clearing skies and a rising sun found the Sea Scout flying close hauled over a rough sea, and

in a tantalizing embarrassment which could scarcely have been anticipated.

But three miles away forward, directly under her nose, so to speak, were three of the sail she had hoped to keep in view—fat-looking transports, or store-ships, every one of them, with a suggestion of easy prize-money in every plank and stitch.

But, on the other hand, directly aft—no further away, and cracking on everything to come up—were to be seen both Termagant and the three-decker.

It was a case of pursuer pursued with a vengeance, the same gale having benefited all sides equally.

"Order the royals out, Mr. Martin!" exclaimed Captain Ben, after taking in the situation and consulting with his officers, "and set the flying jib into the bargain. Now or never's the chance to test the true sailing qualities of our ship, and I am determined to cut out at least one of that trio from under these war-ships' noses, if I've got to give her to the flames on the heels of it."

The privateer sheeted away grandly, and the result of the three-handed maneuvering was watched with the intensest interest.

"We're doing gallantly, sir," said Second Mate Miles Hobby, after a long study of the situation, "but then, the three-decker is a skinner for her bulk."

"I perceive that," replied Ben. "If we only had the Termagant at our heels, we might laugh at her. However, we'll go down to breakfast, and take things easy."

An hour later on two of the merchantmen, which had made the mistake of keeping together, were all but overhauled, while the third, with better judgment, had altered her course to due east, thus having increased her distance with a good chance of escaping.

"They're all of the Termagant's convoy!" cried First Mate Martin. "See, she is signalin' them over our heads."

This was true.

At the same time a ball from one of the three-decker's bow-guns (she was still less than three miles astern) was delivered, but fell a little short.

"You'll have to do better than that, my beauty!" cried Barnacle Ben, laughing; and then he called out forward in a loud voice: "Any one aboard who knows anything about British service signaling?"

Both Gunner Rafferty and Boatswain's Mate Bumper came aft, the former with his accustomed Hibernian grin, and the other stumping along with a wiseacre scowl on his rugged old frontispiece a yard long.

"I know a little, sor," reported the gunner. "But then devil a bit can I make out of what's signaling betwixt an' betwane the sloop an' the darlins that we ought to marry as prizes."

"Stand aside, then, if you please, Mr. Rafferty. Speak out, Uncle Joe! What do you know on the subject?"

"Everything!" was the suddenly bawled reply, in such triumphant and stentorian tones that nearly every one burst out laughing.

"What does that signaling mean, then?"

Uncle Joe shaded his eyes with his hand, and then ceremoniously stumped from one side of the ship to the other and back again, now ducking his head and then cocking it aloft, while squinting first with one eye and then with another.

"They're a-signaling of each other, my lord duke," he presently announced, in such a shrill, squeaking little voice that there was another general laugh over the contrast.

"Don't attempt trifling, Mr. Bumper, or it may be the worse for you!" cried the young skipper, angrily. "What do those signals mean?"

Bumper at once assumed his natural tone as he responded, meekly enough:

"The Termagant orders 'em to take it easy, in order to tempt us to cut 'em out; an' the convoys are answerin' that it's all right."

"That will do, Mr. Bumper; you can return to your station. Mr. Rafferty, see what you can do with our bow-chaser. We're not afraid to yield to temptation."

Mr. Rafferty gleefully sprung forward, and speedily got the chaser in trim, with the assistance of his subordinates.

The two vessels ahead were a full-rigged ship and a brigantine of about equal tonnage.

They were now less than a mile away, sailing but a few cable-lengths apart, and, in obedience to the signals received, were already beginning to shorten sail.

At the first crack of the bow-gun the aim was too high.

But a second made the splinters fly from the brigantine's quarter, while a third brought her main-topmast down with a run.

"Good!" cried Skipper Ben. "Now, Mr. Rafferty, leave your men to work there, while you try your hand at the stern-chaser."

This was done, and directly thereafter the privateer was banging away fore and aft.

The wisdom of this double-ender work was soon apparent.

Rafferty was a superb gunner, his underlings were worthy of him, and the stern-chaser was

a magnificent piece of its class, with an exceptionally powerful range.

After a dozen shots or more from the latter, the Termagant was hit thrice square in the bows, which caused her to come to in some hesitation; while the giant three-decker was herself so fairly peppered about the figure-head and reach-line that even she yawed several points, which materially lessened her speed.

In the mean time, the brigantine's two top-masts were gone, while the ship-rigged fugitive had also suffered severely from the sedulous working of the bow-chaser, and the privateer was now fairly between them.

"Take to your boats!" roared Barnacle Ben, through his trumpet; "I'm going to sink you both off-hand!"

This was called out first on one side, and then on the other, notwithstanding that both vessels were seen to be striking their colors.

CHAPTER XX.

HOT WORK.

"DON'T you see we've struck?" was called out simultaneously from both ship and brigantine.

"Take to your boats!" came the warning once again.

At the same time the privateer showed either broadside in grinning readiness, while the gunners were already at quarters with an alacrity that spoke well for Chief Gunner Rafferty's organizing capacity, though he had been at work drilling his men almost from the initial hour of the voyage.

This time the warning was accepted, and the inmates of the threatened vessels could be seen tumbling into their boats.

"Now let 'em have it!" ordered Captain Ben, at last, when all seemed to have got clear. "We'll see if we can't sink what we can't make prizes of, at all events."

A double flash, a double roar, which caused the privateer to tremble from truck to kelson, and both broadsides were delivered simultaneously.

The aim in every individual instance had been at the water-line, and the effects were sufficiently conclusive in both cases.

As the smoke cleared away the ship was seen already more than half over on her side, while the brigantine was fast settling forward with half her port-bow shot away at the sea-line.

"Enough's as good as a feast!" shouted Barnacle Ben. "Clear away!"

And, heading straight away, the corvette was not six cable-lengths forward from where her broadsides had belched forth when the brigantine disappeared with a last wild plunge; and within ten minutes more the ship had also gone to her long account.

Without paying any attention to the boats or their inmates, the Sea Scout now headed away for the third transport, by this time almost hulldown in the east, while occasionally banging away at the Termagant and the three-decker, both of which kept up the pursuit, the former with the additional intention, as was quite evident, of picking up the boat's crew.

But another storm made its appearance in the northwest.

The heavens rapidly blackened to such a degree that the vessels soon lost sight of each other, and shortly thereafter it was blowing great guns.

The corvette was at once close-hauled, and then, in an informal consultation that was held in her cabin, Miles Hobby said:

"There's a rather important suggestion that I would like to make, Captain Harrup."

"Let us have it," said Barnacle Ben, while Martin and Simmons were likewise all attention. "We've had glory enough for one day, if precious little prize-money into the bargain."

"But I think there is yet more glory to be won, and perhaps prize-money, too," continued Hobby, earnestly. "But there's a risk in the thing."

"We've showed ourselves rather partial to risks thus far. What do you suggest, Miles?"

"That we lay to under as bare poles as we can hazard until the storm blows itself out."

"But we can go half-sheeted in a gale like this."

"I know that, but so can the three-decker as well as we, if not better. See the point?"

"Not quite yet."

"Well, from the taste of our sailing quality that she has had, she will conclude that we shall continue to run before the gale, in order to overhaul that third transport by the time it lets up."

"Like enough."

"So she will keep right on, too, trusting to hold her own with us in the same direction."

"Well?"

"While the Termagant, being the poorer sailer, will be more likely to lie to, just as I suggest that we shall do."

Barnacle Ben struck his thigh emphatically, while the others looked up intelligently.

"By Jupiter!" he exclaimed; "so that we can have the Termagant to ourselves, eh?"

"Just that, sir!" replied Miles.

"Mr. Simmons," cried Ben, turning to the

third mate, "close-haul everything. By Jingo! if she can hold her course under half-studding-sails, let her do it. We'll keep the sloop company in waiting out the storm, if we don't lay up a copper."

"Still," cautioned Mr. Martin, as Simmons disappeared, "it's only guesswork, you know, as to whether the sloop will do the same thing."

"I think it's a little better than guesswork, mate," said Miles, respectfully. "In the first place, the Termagant can't do anything but lie to in such a gale as this. She hasn't got cut-water depth to stand the same press of sail as we, for instance, in spite of her great beam, and she simply won't try to hold on her course with the three-decker."

"I understand, sir," admitted Martin. "Well, we can risk a fight with her single-handed, I suppose?"

"With our superior sailing powers," replied Miles, "I think we can make the venture."

"We'll risk it, anyway!" cried Barnacle Ben. "Better that risk than the one of being overhauled by the frigate later on."

Here a great and alarmed shout was heard from directly overhead, and with one accord they all rushed on deck.

The helm of the corvette had just been put down in time to avoid contact with an enormous phantom-like bulk that was speeding in the twilight of the tempest across her bows on the crest of a stupendous wave.

That fleeting glimpse of the apparition before it vanished away in the obscurity was sufficient.

It was the Termagant, practically under bare poles, and even then driving before the storm.

Mr. Martin turned and gripped Miles Hobby by the hand.

"You were absolutely right in your surmise," he said, heartily. "The sloop will companion us now, without the shadow of a doubt."

But the storm increased, instead of abating, and by nightfall had not yet apparently reached its maximum force.

The power of the wind was simply tremendous, while the seas were all that the Sea Scout could stagger against.

At last Third Mate Tom Simmons came aft from the forecastle with an anxious face, saying:

"We're shipping too much water for'ard, Captain Ben. Unless we can get a square-sail out with which to give her some headway, she won't be able to stand it."

Ben had already noticed the tremendous laboring of the vessel, even while hoping against hope, for the ability to continue lying to.

Maintaining his footing with difficulty, he looked first abroad and then aloft at the rocking bare poles.

The noble vessel, also seemed looking heavenward out of her sore travail in the bosom of the howling and tempestuous night, as much as to say, supplicating:

"Why have you deprived me of my mighty wings? Give them back to me, that I may balance myself hoveringly, as is my wont, amid this yeast of waves. Give them to me, or I must die!"

It was hard to resign that tempting of lying to somewhere in the great sloop's company until the storm should blow itself out, but there was no escape from it.

"See if you can put a bend into the foretop-sail, without its going into ribbons, Tom," said Ben, regretfully. "That ought to steady her."

This was accordingly done.

The sail was got out and stood the blow, after being sharply clewed down, though threatening every instant to fly into rags.

The vessel instantly showed the relief she felt, riding the big rollers with an ease which had before been impossible.

"Don't be down in the mouth about it, Cap," cheerfully advised Miles Hobby, at Ben's elbow. "The sloop-of-war will like enough have been compelled to do the same."

"Scant chance!" was the gloomy response. "It's a long blow we're in for, and we may be leagues upon leagues apart when it breaks at last."

However, when the storm did begin to break away, after lasting all that day and the best part of the ensuing night, it did so with great rapidity; and just at break of another day a great, shadowy hulk was seen rising and falling three or four miles to leeward.

"We've kept her through it all!" exclaimed the second mate, exultantly. "It's the Termagant!"

This became more evident as the light broadened fitfully over the still stormy sea.

"By Jupiter! and she's already making sail, too!" cried the young commander, rubbing his hands. "I don't believe she has seen us yet."

The Sea Scout was accordingly headed direct for the enemy, cramming on sail by slow degrees.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN OLD-FASHIONED SEA-FIGHT.

"TRY the bow-gun on her, Mr. Rafferty," Ben at last ordered. "We might as well get her range now as later on."

This was done, the gun being fired as soon as the corvette mounted a convenient crest, the bolt going wide of the mark, as was all but unavoidable with the sea that was running, but none the less establishing the range.

Other shots followed with more encouragement, though still without hitting the mark, while the sloop was not long in replying, as a reminder that she was a big war-ship yet, and with none of her teeth gone.

In spite of the severity and protracted nature of the storm, its exigencies had been met without more than doubling the watches.

Thus the crew of the Sea Scout had had their regular rest but little broken into, and were consequently in good condition, though it was safe to presume that the Termagant had enjoyed equally good luck.

By eight bells, or soon after breakfast, the sea, though still very rough, had gone down sufficiently for the corvette to begin a display of her superior sailing qualities to advantage.

Fresh canvas was thrown out from time to time, and by ten o'clock she was bearing down upon the foe, a towering vision of white, like a gigantic storm-bird intent upon her prey.

But the sloop, though slower, was still the heavier, more powerful ship, sturdy, alert, and the undaunted virago to her core.

Crack! she had got in the first shot, too; the splinters flying in showers from the corvette's bowsprit tip, where the glancing ball had struck.

"What interval do you make?" coolly demanded Ben of Mr. Martin, whose watch it was.

"Mile and three-quarters, scant," was the reply, after a calculating glance over the intervening water-space.

"So do I. Round her to. Mr. Rafferty, we shall have to begin work with our Long Tom."

The first shot from the redoubtable stern-chaser was seen with the glass to plug the sloop fairly amidships, while the second sent the splinters flying from her poop-deck.

The Termagant, not being able to maneuver with anything like such rapidity, replied with the entire broadside of twenty-four-pounders, only one of which took effect, and that but slightly, in the corvette's foretop.

"We must have a little more sea-room," said Ben. "It's safer to keep plugging at her from a distance."

Accordingly, the Sea Scout fell off half a mile, and then for the next hour or two kept pegging away pretty successfully with either bow or stern-chaser as was most convenient, and with pretty uniform success.

The sloop, having only one thirty-two pounder at her stern, could only respond occasionally, her broadsides now falling short.

At last, close on to noon, the sea still being angry and the sky overcast, a lucky shot from the Sea Scout's bow-gun cut off the sloop's entire main-top, thus crippling her naturally slow movements considerably, while the next globe of iron from the Long Tom was seen to wreck her bowsprit.

"She's pretty well riddled!" said Captain Ben, after a long observation through his glass.

Then, turning to Martin and Miles Hobby, who were at his side, he asked:

"Do you think we might venture in at closer quarters yet?"

The older seaman slowly shook his head, while Hobby replied:

"I wouldn't advise it as yet. She is still a dozen guns and perhaps a hundred men the stronger. Better keep safely pegging away, in my opinion, Captain Ben."

"All right!" cheerfully. "You are both older and wiser than I."

The Scout was now rounding out for perhaps the thirtieth time in order to bring the brass stern-gun into play.

"Oi think Oi can show them a new thrick this time, gentlemen," observed Mr. Rafferty, while sighting the chaser. "At all evints, that foretop of the owld devil seems to me to have been shtandin' long enough, be the Powers!"

Crack! went the piece, and he rose triumphantly as not only the Termagant's foretop, but her entire foremast, was seen to go by the board, sheer off at the deck-line, with all its raffles of sails and rigging tangling about her bows.

Rafferty grinned from ear to ear, while a great shout went up from the privateer, as a personal compliment to himself.

"Magnificent!" cried Barnacle Ben, gripping the gunner's grimy hand. "Another shot like that will leave her at our mercy."

"Och, but that was a mere flay-bite, your Honor! But you can run in on the devil now, if yez pl'aze, for there's a thrick left worth two of that."

And he danced away in the direction of the bow-gun as the ship came about, napping another hole through her canvas as she did so.

The result of the next shot from the bow-gun was yet more gratifying.

There was a flash and a roar from the sloop's midships, and, from the confusion that was plainly observed to ensue, with the aid of the

glass, it was evident that one of her magazines had blown up.

"Run her in!" shouted Captain Ben, enthusiastically. "Prudence or no prudence, these broadsides of ours must be got to work!"

The Scout was accordingly headed straight for her foe, making play from her bow-gun with more or less success as she did so.

But the Termagant's people had already cleared away their raffle with amazing energy, and, though numbers of wounded men could be seen being carried away from the scene of the explosion, three boats were already being lowered.

"Aha! she would board us, eh?" cried Ben. "Beat to quarters, Mr. Hobby. Now then, Mr. Rafferty, how about that broadside?"

Just then it was delivered, and with splendid effect, at less than a mile.

Two of the Termagant's guns were seen to have been dismounted, while there seemed to be scarcely anything left of her after-port gunwale.

But at the same time her own broadside had been poured out, with the effect of completely wrecking the privateer's bowsprit, and killing four men in the starboard bows.

The three boats had by this time quitted the sloop's side.

They were fairly crammed with Jack-tars armed to the teeth, and the foremost, a cutter carrying over forty men, displayed an eighteen-pounder brass swivel-gun at her bow.

"All hands to resist boarders!" was now the order that rung through the privateer, while the drummer and fifer were rattling and screaming away. "Once more with that same broadside, Mr. Rafferty!"

It came five minutes later, with the enemy's boats not ten rods distant.

The cutter in the van went to pieces, riddled with iron hail, but the Britishers never wavered, as they picked up their swimming or floating or sinking companions, while continuing to press on.

Musketry was volleyed upon them but on they came, their close-packed, alert sea-bull logs seemingly more than decimated at every stroke of the swift-dipping oars.

A crash! The grapping-irons had caught, and now they were swarming and fighting their way up the corvette's low sides like so many tigers.

But no less tigrish and desperate the valor and energy that encountered the swarming rush, contesting every inch of plank and bulwark line with shot, cutlass, hatchet or belaying-pin.

For a few moments the mastery seemed to hang in the balance, when suddenly Anak, the giant negro cook, appeared in the hottest of the press bearing in his arms a great caldron of boiling water, notwithstanding that the hot metal must have caused him intense scorching pains at every step.

"Way dere, gen'lemen!" he shouted, in his thick African dialect. "Dinner-bell's struck, an' warm soup am de ordah ob de day."

With that he emptied the contents of the caldron with such cleverness that a score or more of the Britishers, scalded beyond endurance, leaped into the sea with as many agonized screams, while the caldron itself, hurled after them, killed two who had been left to look after the jolly-boat.

Then there was a crowning rush on the part of the privateersmen, and the sanguinary attempt at boarding the Sea Scout was a thing of the past.

Not more than half the original count of boarders, who had numbered over a hundred men in all, were enabled to regain the two remaining boats, and push off amid a shower of missiles, to say nothing of irregular death-shots falling thick and fast.

Corpses lined the regained bulwarks and floated upon the tossing waves, while the mere fragments of humanity—chopped-off hands, scattered brains, and the like—were strewn with dead bodies along the contested deck.

"About ship!" roared Barnacle Ben, his cutlass red, his face ablaze with the light of victory. "Another broadside for them, and then, by Jupiter! we'll try our hands at boarding."

In less than five minutes the corvette had rounded to within short pistol-range, and then broadside after broadside was poured into the sloop as fast as the guns could be worked and with a tremendous effect that seemed to complete the bewilderment of the enemy.

CHAPTER XXII.

SOUTHWARD HO!

ANOTHER of the Termagant's boats was sunk before it could get back to her.

Then as, under a rough-and-ready system preconcerted at the suggestion of old Bumper, a shower of hand-grenades, deftly thrown, fell upon her crowded decks, exploding where they dropped with dire execution, the vessels' sides crashed against each other and the grapnels were out from the victorious privateer.

Headed by Barnacle Ben aft, and by Miles Hobby forward, then the Sea Scout's men poured upon the enemy's decks with a disorganized

rush that was irresistible from the very fury of its momentum.

As with the American volunteers at Buena Vista seventy years later, each man seemed to feel that the success of the day depended upon his individual efforts.

They fought rather as demons than as men, and in a way that seemed to appall their adversaries, brave and tried as they were, notwithstanding that they at last made a determined back-to-back stand amidships, which for some moments rolled back the onset of the privateersmen successfully.

"Hold fast, there!" shouted their captain, a splendid-looking officer, bravely encouraging his men, sword in hand, though with his left arm already in an improvised sling. "These scoundrels are not honest sailors, but pirates, who will throw every one of you to the sharks if they can. Now, again!"

"It's false!" cried out Barnacle Ben, over the horror and din of it all. "We're Yankee sailors, and shall treat you as men if you give in."

Then he staggered back, faint and dizzy, under a blow from a belaying-pin, while at the same instant the British captain and his first lieutenant went reeling back, shot to death.

But, as the combatants were still about equal in numbers, with the superior discipline in favor of King George's Jack-tars and marines, the victory would have yet hung doubtfully in the balance but for a fresh surprise that was furnished by the giant darky Anak.

He suddenly arose, as if by magic, in the very midst of the British marines, naked to the waist, a demoniac grin on his black face, and with a heavy six-foot crowbar wielded in both hands, at once began laying about him in long, sweeping strokes that mowed down the enemy right and left, like swaths of grain under the reaper's scythe.

"Golly, but dis am de 'citement fur coons!" yelled the giant. "Gory mighty, but I'se happy! Set 'em up an' knock 'em ober! Dat's de game!" and he continued on his devastating way.

Bumper created the next sensation by snatching off his wooden leg, and improvising it as a war-club, as he hopped this way and that amid the press.

"Beeswax and pumpkins!" he shouted, executing his decidedly novel war-dance, with the heavy end of the stump bringing down a man at almost every blow; "and I'm the sort of peg-leg they retired from the naval service, am I? Apple-jack and jiggers! but there's Yankee Doodle in the old man yet."

Then there was a last combined rush, from fore and aft, on the part of the privateersmen, and the sea-fight was at an end.

"How do you sum up the result?" asked the young commander an hour later, when he was receiving his mate's reports in the cabin of the Sea Scout, where he was half-reclining, still faint and dizzy from the bruising blow he had received.

Silas Martin consulted a slip of paper in his hand.

"We've one hundred and twenty prisoners," he said, "sound and wounded in our hands. Most of the wounded, forty in all, will get well, according to the British surgeon's report.

"The prisoners include the lieutenant in charge at the time of surrender, Mr. Shoreton and three midshipmen, whose names I have not learned.

"All the Termagant's non-commissioned officers are prisoners.

"The result on 't'other side, as near as can now be made out, are one hundred and twenty killed, among them the British post-captain in command, his first lieutenant, and two midshipmen.

"Our own losses are eighteen killed and thirty-nine wounded, none of them mortally."

"In what condition does the sloop come into our hands?"

Second Mate Hobby here read from a memorandum he had made.

This was to the effect that, barring the injury to her spars, rigging and poop-deck, all of which could be speedily repaired, the Termagant was practically in almost as sound and stanch condition as before the fight.

"A fine present for the infant American Navy at our hands, eh?" said Ben, a faint flush of pride coming into his pale cheeks. "I wonder if the Congress at Philadelphia will vouchsafe to consider that we have earned our letter-of-marque commission now."

"It is a magnificent prize!" exclaimed Martin, while Miles Hobby exultingly nodded. "In fact, now that it is all over, I can scarcely realize how we achieved it."

"The men simply fought like fiends!" commented Miles. "That is the only explanation of our princely good luck that I can think of. How shall you dispose of her, captain?"

"Clap on a prize crew, and accompany her to the vicinity of Block Island, in which vicinity I understand that our allies, the French fleet, are cruising," was the prompt response.

"We may pick up a cheaper prize or two on our way thither. After that, Southward ho!"

"Nothing could be better," observed the first mate. "Repairs are already under way, the

wounded are being cared for as well as can be expected, and the prisoners are already told off and classified. We ought to make sail by sunset."

"What is our position by the sextant?"

"Two hundred miles due east of Barnegat," replied Hobby, mentioning the latitude and longitude.

"Humph! only a two days' cruise from the French fleet! How is our prize off for provisions and ammunition?"

"A plentiful supply of both, together with twelve thousand pounds sterling in the money-chest."

Barnacle Ben's eyes sparkled.

"Not bad for a starter!" he exclaimed. "By the way, that surgeon of theirs did not look like a Britisher, from the glimpse I had of him."

"Both he and his assistant," replied Martin, "are Quebec Frenchmen, pressed into their present service. I've no doubt they would join us."

"Better and better! See to this at once, Silas. As soon as things are a little more to rights, I must thank the crew formally for their superb conduct, and I wish to make special cases of both Anak, the cook, and old Bumper."

Both mates looked pleased.

"Every one will be glad of that, I am sure," said Miles Hobby. "The negro's bravery was particularly grand—in a mere slave, too."

"He's a free man from this time forth, if I can make him so!" replied Barnacle Ben. "As perhaps you are both aware, the negro and his wife are both the property of Mistress Mercy Lord, my betrothed. Well, just as soon as I can communicate with her the free papers shall be made out for the pair of them, you can depend on it."

Here Tom Simmons came down to say that Lieutenant Shoreton wished to know if he could have a few words in private with the captain.

The lieutenant had surrendered his sword formally directly at the close of the fight.

"Send him down here," said Captain Ben. "He seemed a rather modest young fellow for his station, and I'd like to make matters as easy for him personally as I can consistently."

When the lieutenant was alone with his captor, he disclaimed any intention of seeking any special terms for himself, and then said:

"I am merely filled with overpowering curiosity, Captain Harrup, to learn how you could have come into possession of this corvette, which has so long been considered the crack vessel of her class in the Royal Navy. Would you mind giving me a brief history of her capture?"

Barnacle Ben accordingly gratified him, and with something more of detail than might have been expected.

When he came to speak of the part that Lieutenant Manners had taken in the fight for the corvette, the young man started to his feet, his eyes flashing.

"That scoundrel!" he exclaimed, between his teeth.

"What, then?" cried Captain Ben. "You are acquainted with the young gentleman?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

A MEMORABLE CRUISE.

The British lieutenant bit his lip, frowned, and then said, slowly:

"I should think I did know the young gentleman—and your sarcasm in so designating Eugene Manners is appreciated by me to the full, Captain Harrup. If we ever meet, I shall kill him or he shall kill me! Fortunately for him, he was never on board the Champion when our fellows chanced to hobnob with her officers, which was quite often. However, excuse me for having interrupted your interesting recital, captain. My quarrel with Manners is altogether a family affair."

Barnacle Ben went on with his story, thinking that he would never hear of the young man or his quarrel again after delivering him over as a prisoner of war.

"Strange!" exclaimed Lieutenant Shoreton, when the story had been told. "It sounds more like a romance than the sober truth. I am sadly afraid," with a smile, "that we shall never be able to conquer you Americans back to your old-time allegiance, Captain Harrup."

"I feel uncommonly certain of it!" cried the commander of the Sea Scout, with a laugh. "However, I don't blame you for taking a blue look at things just now, my friend."

And then the interview terminated.

After the public acknowledgments of what he was indebted to for the brave conduct of his crew, and making special mention of Anak and Uncle Joe Bumper, in accordance with his announced intention, Ben sailed northward with his prize and prisoners, making fresh captures of two valuable store-ships off the Long Island shore, and finally coming up with the French fleet at their rendezvous four days later in the vicinity of Martha's Vineyard Island.

The French admiral was not present upon his flagship, but his officers received the young privateer captain with the most flattering compliments upon what he had performed.

They took charge of his prizes and prisoners, giving a receipt for the same, and promising to place all at the disposition of the American Congress at the earliest opportunity.

Though the initial cruise of the Sea Scout had now lasted but little more than a week, Barnacle Ben was extremely anxious to obtain home-news of Mercy Lord and his mother; but as there was no likelihood of his having such an opportunity, he put the temptation behind him by hastening the inception of his Southern cruise, after a stay of but two days as the guest of the gay French officers, who would have been willing enough to make a lion of him indefinitely.

Three days after the start southward, the Sea Scout fell in with and captured the rich British West Indiaman David Grant, an exceptionally large and valuable ship, which was forthwith dispatched for the harbor of Brest with a prize-crew on board.

This was about one hundred miles off Cape May, and from thence on for a period of three months the cruise down the coast was one of immense and phenomenal success.

By the time she put into the French island of Martinique, the S. a Scout had made such a name for herself as had scarcely ever been paralleled in privateering annals.

The enormous number of forty-six prizes, big and little, rich, poor and indifferent, had been taken in that period; she had escaped, sometimes apparently all but miraculously, every effort of the British fleet to capture or destroy her; and even at this early stage in her career had become a veritable terror of the seas for everything bearing the British flag, while, naturally enough, her course was the subject of immense jubilation throughout the struggling Colonies.

It was toward the beginning of February before Barnacle Ben, now a distinguished character, headed northward once more, and it was a week later that he fell in with the first news from home.

It came to him in a sufficiently unexpected and romantic manner.

There was at this time a noted corsair calling himself Captain Death who, with his fleet schooner, which rejoiced in the terrifying name of the Azrael, was an unenviable power in the Spanish Main and elsewhere.

On the third day of sailing from Martinique the Sea Scout was so fortunate as to interrupt this marauder in one of his indiscriminate devilries by coming to the rescue of a French brig, the Daphne, just as she was about to fall into the pirate's hands, the Azrael managing to make her own escape through a superior knowledge of the intricacies of a small tropical archipelago near which the rescue was effected.

On going on board the Daphne at the earnest invitation of the grateful skipper, the latter made his appearance accompanied by a passenger, whom Barnacle Ben at once recognized with a start of astonishment.

"Captain Scudder!" he exclaimed.

The Britisher, for it was indeed he, hesitated a moment, and then, stepping forward, offered his hand.

"It is strange, indeed, that we should thus meet again, Captain Harrup," he said, with a certain dignity of manner. "Brief as is your fame, it had already reached me before I quitted America. In one respect, sir, I dare say we are companions in misfortune."

He was looking broken down in mind and body."

"What, you seem to be old acquaintances, gentlemen?" here interposed the skipper of the rescued brig, with true French politeness, at the same time with an unusual knowledge of English. "Permit me to leave you alone in my cabin until you shall have exchanged your confidences, and I will venture to rejoin you later."

The offer was thankfully accepted, the two men presently finding themselves alone in the brig's saloon, with wine and other refreshments at their disposal.

"You spoke of our being companions in misfortune, sir," said Ben. "In what way can this be so?"

"In the first place, tell me," replied the Englishman, "if I am right in my surmise that you are entirely without advices from America since your capture of the corvette and your start upon this exceptionally wonderful privateering career of yours."

"You are perfectly right in that surmise, sir. In fact, I was just starting on a homeward voyage when I fell in with this vessel so fortunately."

"Then there is a long story to tell you. Little did I think, young man, that the whirligig of fate would thus cast us together in a common misfortune."

"But you still speak in riddles, sir."

"Patience, if you please. Well, I might as well go to the heart of the matter at once. You were the betrothed husband of the beautiful and amiable Mistress Mercy Lord?"

"I was and am."

"Fortunate and yet miserable youth!" cried Captain Scudder. "Both Mistress Mercy Lord, your betrothed, and Mistress Mary Harrup, your sister, have long been in the power of your foe and mine, Lieutenant Manners."

Barnacle Ben started back, glaring at him in an agony of agitation, which he vainly endeavored to control.

"You mean it?" he hoarsely gasped.

"I do. Here, drink this." Captain Scudder tendered him a large glass of red wine. "It will brace you up."

The youth mechanically obeyed, drawing a long breath after the yet longer draught.

"Go on!" he at last said, with a mirthless laugh. "My mother? Doubtless she is dead or in the toils, too. Troubles of this sort seldom come singly in my experience."

"Your mother is doubtless still alive, I opine," continued the other, "and as well as can be expected."

"How should you know these things, sir?" demanded Captain Ben, sternly. "You are an Englishman, a British naval officer, and an aristocrat—sufficiently removed in rank and sphere from me and mine."

"Rather say that I was such, and you will be nearer the truth," corrected the Englishman, a deep sadness in his voice and manner. "But are you ready to hear my strange story, in which your happiness and fortunes have come to be curiously involved?"

"I await your disclosures with impatience," was the reply.

"I shall give it to you as succinctly as lies in my power. And you can help me out to that end with such queries as chance to suggest themselves."

"Go on, I beg of you."

"It was just one week following after your daring capture of the corvette that I received a message from Mistress Mercy Lord, urging me to grant her my protection against a great misfortune that was threatening her."

"What?" cried Barnacle Ben, angrily; "such a message from my betrothed to you? You would have me believe this?"

"You will believe this and yet stranger things before I shall have finished. Patience!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ENGLISHMAN'S STRANGE STORY.

"You can perhaps readily conjecture," Captain Scudder went on, "the fury of rage and humiliation that possessed the British officers in and around New York over your extraordinary exploit in the harbor of Perth Amboy, only thirty miles so away."

"Two days thereafter an armed brig, with an entire regiment of grenadiers, took possession of the place, under the command of Lieutenant Manners, who had first brought the intelligence of the disaster to our fleet, and whose near relationship to Lord Howe readily secured him the command of the expedition.

"I see you already begin to open your eyes, Captain Harrup, and well you may."

"If the natives of Perth Amboy were likely to have a hard time of it in the spirit of rage and reprisal that prevailed, you can judge for yourself as to what Mistress Mercy was to expect from such an unprincipled rascal as Eugene Manners under the peculiar circumstances."

"Three days later, a negro woman, Mistress Mercy's slave, brought me a letter from her. I wish I had that letter now, but, together with many other important papers, it has gone the way of my fate and my fortune—to the dogs, sir, literally to the dogs."

"But I can give you a sketch of its contents. The young lady began with a frank avowal of her betrothal to you, the man of her heart. Then she appealed to me, as an English gentleman and a man of honor, for protection against the attentions with which Manners was pursuing her."

"I not only do not like, but I positively detest, this man," she went on to say. "And yet I feel certain that he is meditating some plot to carry me off with him. Sir, I supplicate your intercession in this matter in the name of your own daughters, whom you have occasionally spoken to me about as being innocent young girls of about my own age." And so on in much the same strain, but with a pathos and piteousness that I should in vain endeavor to reproduce from memory.

"Sir, I don't mind acknowledging to you that I had imagined myself in love with Mistress Lord, and that I had strongly cherished the hope of making her my wife, inconsistent as this may seem to you in consideration of my age."

"However, it is none the less true; and it is equally true that this pathetic letter wrought a change in my thoughts and feelings."

"I resolved to answer its appeal in the true spirit in which it was made to me. If in my power, I would assuredly save Mistress Mercy Lord from her peril—in the interests of virtue, of humanity, of womanhood. Do you believe me?"

There was something in the Englishman's voice and manner that struck his listener as being instinctively genuine, earnest and noble. Barnacle Ben hesitated a moment, and then impulsively extended his hand.

"I do believe you, sir," he said, with much simplicity. "There is my hand on it! Pray proceed, sir."

"Thank you!" And then Captain Scudder went on: "I first visited Admiral Lord Howe, and bluntly informed him of his nephew's de-testable conduct."

"Admiral Lord Howe is a peculiar man, my young friend," and Scudder smiled bitterly. "Imagine a man of lofty rank and undeniable ability, with a heart of stone, a soul of corruption, a worshiper at the altar of family pride. Then you will have Admiral Lord Howe pretty fairly pictured in your mind."

"Why should you concern yourself in this little affair of my nephew's, Scudder?" he asked, with a sneer. "Do you want the girl for yourself? I controlled myself sufficiently to tell him the truth in the matter. He laughed incredulously. 'If the girl,' said he, 'is betrothed to that infernal young rebel to whom we are chiefly indebted for the humiliating disgrace that has come upon our fleet, she deserves her fate. Let her go!'

"I then struck at his family pride, telling him what I believed to be the truth, that Manners was desirous of abducting the young lady in order to make her his wife."

"This shaft, however, failed to touch him. The man was too corrupt himself to believe in the existence of the virtuous principle in one of his class. And here let me state, sir, to the credit of the man I hate, that I do believe him to be actuated by an honorable motive in his passion for Mistress Lord. But Lord Howe only looked at me pityingly."

"Eugene Manners is not such a soft and consummate ass as you seem, in your own softness, to believe, Captain Scudder," said he. "This sentimentality at your time of life is scarcely becoming to the reputation you have earned for yourself in the service. Pray don't trouble me any more about this trivial matter."

"Trivial matter!" I repeated, no longer able to control my temper. "Do you thus characterize a question involving the future happiness of a refined lovely and estimable young lady, my lord?"

"He looked at me contemptuously and then replied, in a cold, hard voice: 'In the case of an accursed rebel's wife, daughter or sweetheart, yes—now and always! Good-morning!'

"I hurriedly returned to my ship, and thence immediately sent a written request to Lord Howe for a week's leave of absence. He probably suspected that I would employ myself personally in Mistress Lord's relief. At all events, the request was peremptorily refused."

"I found myself in a grievous dilemma, but was not long in deciding to remain true to the young lady's appeal, even if it should cost me my commission."

"Notwithstanding that Lord Howe is my kinsman—and so is Lieutenant Manners, for that matter—I think I would have found another way out of the difficulty by challenging him on the spot, had I thought that he would have consented to meet me on the field of honor. But, besides the great difference in our respective ranks, I knew that he would be justified in treating the defi as preposterous."

"He might also have been assisted to this end by personal inclinations; for I happen to know that Lord Howe is not, personally, a brave man."

"Well, then my other resolution was taken. Before night of that same day, after sending back the slave with a verbal message that the appeal should not pass unheeded, I was on my way to Perth Amboy."

"I proceeded on horseback, and was accompanied solely by my valet."

"Fortunately, and that notwithstanding our recent duel, almost the first person I met after reaching the town was Lieutenant Manners."

"Prior to the duel we had not been bad friends, and I now offered him my hand, told him frankly the object of my visit, and sought to appeal to his better nature in the matter just as if he had been my own son."

"Much to my satisfaction—for I did not yet comprehend the depths of duplicity to which Eugene Manners could descend—he met me half-way, and declared that my fears as to Mistress Lord's safety were without foundation."

"Why, there is just this about it," he exclaimed. "I still love the young lady to distraction, and would gladly marry her on the spot. But, unfortunately for me, she loves another man, and will not have me. That is the long and short of it. I would rush to her protection at once, if needs were."

"I even told him of my visit to Lord Howe, and then said: 'But your family would never countenance your marriage with a young lady in Mistress Lord's comparatively humble position in life, Eugene.'

"That for my family!" he cried, with a snap of his fingers, 'if Mistress Mercy only cared to have me. But she does not, old fellow.—her heart is wholly wrapped up in that incomprehensible young hypocrite who captured the corvette; and there is an end.'

"But do you not still force your society upon the young lady?" I asked.

"Inquire at Widow Harrup's cottage for yourself," he replied, with a laugh. "Perhaps you will find that there are more pretty girls in the world besides only Mistress Mercy Lord; though, to be sure, blondes were never quite so much to my taste as the dark ones."

"I was completely deceived by his friendli-

ness of manner, and lost no time in paying my respects to Mistress Lord."

"The estimable young lady appreciated to the full the disinterestedness of my prompt response to her appeal, but was in no wise reassured by Manners's professions as reported by me."

"I cannot trust in the honesty of that man's professions, sir," she said. "True, he is pretending to have transferred his attentions to Mary Harrup—to whom they might be more welcome than to me, did she not know him for what he is—but I am certain that he has not for an instant relinquished his designs upon my happiness. I detect his evil intentions in his manner when here, and, besides, there is more substantial proof as to his hypocrisy and duplicity than this."

"She thereupon related to me the manner in which you, Captain Harrup, had exposed Eugene's double-facedness to both herself and your sister."

"Much more was said, in which Mistress Lord convinced me at last that her uneasiness was well-founded."

"Your mother and sister were then introduced to me, and took part in our conferences."

"They agreed with Mistress Mercy that there was danger in the lieutenant's secret designs, and all seemed to rely upon my presence in a way that touched me nearly; for, of course, apart from my own ship I was absolutely without any real power to back up my proffers of protection."

"My sister!" interrupted Barnacle Ben, with no little secret agitation, at this point; "did—did she seem to accept the lieutenant's spurious attentions with satisfaction?"

"She struck me as playing a part—perhaps with a view to protect Mistress Mercy. In other words, she seemed to be pretending to be pleased with Manners's fascinations while her heart was otherwise engaged."

"Thank you," said the young commander, much relieved. "Then I presume the lieutenant put in an appearance while you were at my mother's cottage."

"He did so; and I must say that his behavior with both young ladies was that considerate and circumspect as to deceive even myself. You can then judge as to the degree in which it went toward allaying the women's fears and lulling their suspicions to rest. Ah! had I but suspected the truth."

"What do you mean?"

"You are on the point of learning that. By hard riding I had arrived at the village in the middle of the afternoon. Toward nightfall I quitted the ladies in Manners's company. He was very friendly, and offered me the hospitalities of his ship—doubtless certain beforehand that I would not accept, which was the case. He returned to his vessel, after renewed professions of esteem, while I sought the accommodations of the village inn."

"I was awakened by my valet at dawn of day with the information that the Widow Harrup's cottage was in flames."

"My mother's cottage—the home of my birth—burned!" interjected Ben, in consternation and grief.

"Yes, yes! A crowd of excited townspeople were gathered there when I reached the spot."

"The widow and the greater part of her household effects had been rescued from the burning house."

"Mistress Mercy and your sister had disappeared—been spirited away, together with the master's slave-woman."

"The widow could give no explanation. The smoke and glare of the fire at its incipiency had awakened her; she had rushed frantically from room to room, only to find herself the sole inmate."

"Inquiries on my part among Manners's subordinate officers were more successful. Manners had also disappeared, as a matter of course. So had a smart cutter-yacht, one of the armed brig's tenders, together with the lieutenant's body-servant, and a crew of four British tars devoted to his private interests."

"He had on some pretext lured the young ladies to the water's edge shortly before day-break, forcibly abducted them, together with the negro woman, and then ordered the cottage to be secretly fired, heedless of what the widow's fate might be. And he was now off in the cutter with his prizes, to say nothing of a large sum of the brig's money, his destination being Florida or Jamaica, inasmuch as he would not dare to risk the Atlantic passage in such a light boat in the autumn of the year."

"All this I gathered from a young midshipman who had been more or less in the double-faced scoundrel's confidence."

"I only lingered long enough in the village to see Mistress Harrup safely housed with her effects in a comfortable shelter, with her future subsistence assured to her, and then hurried back to New York, post-haste, reaching the city by nightfall of that day."

"I rushed to the admiral with my intelligence. How do you think he received me and my information?"

Ben shook his head.

"With contumely and contempt—in a tempest of fury at his nephew's escapade, which he

accused me of precipitating by my 'officious, goody-goody intermeddling,' as he was pleased to characterize my action! He then peremptorily ordered me under arrest for quitting my frigate without leave, and I found myself in close confinement with a court martial, inspired by his power and influence, staring me in the face."

"On the following morning, however, I received an underhanded intimation that I could escape prosecution (another name for persecution in my case) by throwing up my commission forthwith."

"It was a hard condition. In spite of my family connections, which are not inferior to Lord Howe's own, I had won my post-captaincy by years of hard service, and was naturally looking hopefully forward to yet higher honors before seeking my retirement. But I regarded my proffer of protection to Mistress Lord, and her grateful acceptance of the same, as a pledge of honor upon my part as indubitably as if it had been made to one of my own daughters."

"Hard as was the condition imposed, I therefore accepted it without hesitation, if with many regrets. I tendered my resignation on the spot, and was a free man."

"Luckily, I am wealthy, with funds constantly at my disposal. I at once devoted myself to securing, manning, and provisioning a cutter—a larger, stancher and fleet one than Manners's—and, three days later, was in pursuit, with such information of his destination as I had been able to gain as my guide."

"But you know without the telling how vague and uncertain such a quest must necessarily be. After a month's buffettings along the coast, I first got wind of my fugitive at St. Augustine, where he had laid over a few days. From there he had started for Bermuda or Jamaica, it was uncertain which, but with the weight of such diverse reports as I could gather in favor of the former."

"From the English governor at St. Augustine I learned that the young ladies had appealed to him for a release from the young man's custody, but, inasmuch as they could not assert that he had treated them with disrespect other than forcing them to remain in his cutter against their will, he had not seen fit to interfere."

CHAPTER XXV.

CAPTAIN SCUDDER CONTINUES HIS STORY.

"I REACHED the Bermudas," continued the Britisher, "after a tempestuous voyage of three weeks, and only to find that Manners had again foiled me."

"He had touched at the island, and then pursued his voyage to Jamaica."

"Once more I started in pursuit. After being nearly wrecked in a hurricane in the vicinity of Porto Rico two weeks ago, I was suddenly overtaken by Captain Death, the pirate captain of the Azrael, and brought to under the muzzle of his grinning stern-chaser."

"Of course, I had heard of this scoundrel's career, as who that sails these tropic seas has not. As a consequence, I gave myself up for lost, while my men turned ghastly with fear, as soon as I saw the ominous black flag, with its skull and cross-bones, and realized that I was in the power of a corsair who is reported to have but one creed in the prosecution of his trade—that embodied in the proverbial saying that dead men tell no tales."

"But something of a surprise was in store for me. On being ordered aboard the pirate, I hurriedly complied, and with the misgivings natural to such a predicament."

"Imagine my astonishment when the dreaded commander—a bronzed, handsome man of about my own age, but with a hardened look that made him seem sufficiently in his element among his miscellaneous cut-throats—stepped toward me with extended hand and such words as these: 'Hallo, Scudder! what in the world are you doing in these parts? And how are the rest of the gun-room mess of the old Arethusa?'"

"Then I recognized him. The pirate, Captain Death, was identical with one Geoffrey Dunham, a man of good family, who had been a brother midshipman with me on the frigate Arethusa a quarter of a century before, when we were both little more than boys. He had subsequently, after our separation, shared in a mutiny on board the sloop-of-war Dreadnaught, for which he was sentenced to death, but had escaped by swimming on the eve of the day fixed for his execution, and, not having been heard of afterward, had been supposed as dead."

"Making no secret of my astonishment, but carefully masking the horror with which this revelation inspired me, I grasped the man's extended hand. He invited me into his cabin—a wonder of luxuriousness in its way, and we spent an hour or two over about the rarest wines I had ever tasted, and in chatting over our youthful times and acquaintances."

"But not a word did he hint of his later and darker career, and you may rely upon it, my friend, that I did not jog his understanding in that regard. In fact, notwithstanding my agreeable memories of him—and a franker, heartier, better-natured English lad than Geoffrey Dunham had never been the life of a frigate gun-room, though something of a dare-devil

into the bargain—there was everything in his changed personality that impressed me with secret repugnance and fear.

"You may have seen and admired a beautiful lace kerchief of immaculate whiteness; and can imagine what effect the same delicate fabric would have upon you if spotted with the red stains of a mysterious murder."

"Well, it was in much the same feeling that I viewed the character of this singular and desperate man."

"Presently, after chatting of old times, he suddenly asked for an explanation of the position in which he found me, and with a harsh peremptoriness of tone and manner. I deemed it best to admit the truth, and did so with fullest details."

"It is perhaps fortunate that you came upon me," he said, with a sinister laugh, "since you would surely never overtake this young rascal with his brace of fair prizes. Send your money-chest aboard to me, and I will run him down for you."

"I was about to expostulate when a terrible look silenced me. The money-chest—containing all I possessed, with the exception of a hundred pounds or so in bank-notes, which I chanced to have on my person—was accordingly sent on board the pirate, who also helped himself to such of our stores as appeared to take his fancy. After that we were mockingly given leave to sheer off, and thank our stars we had not been given to the sharks."

"As the Azrael was sheeting away, Captain Death shouted to me, with an assumption of *bonhomie*: 'I say, old messmate! don't apprehend that the pretty doves will come to any harm after I shall have snatched them from their present custodian and tossed him to the sharks. I have got a wife or two already on every isle of the Caribbees for that matter!'

"We continued on our course for Jamaica, but met with adverse winds and frequent squalls from that time on."

"One week ago we were swamped in a terrific squall, which capsized the cutter. All my companions perished, and I managed to cling to the bottom until rescued by the skipper of this vessel, which you so opportunely rescued out of the corsair's clutches to-day."

"Frenchman though he is, he has received me most humanely. He is on his way from Colon to Trinidad, but I have about persuaded him to alter his course so as to put me ashore at Kingston, Jamaica, where I am in hopes of overtaking Manners forthwith, or of continuing my pursuit of him as soon as I shall be able to obtain remittances from my English estate for that purpose. My story is ended."

CHAPTER XXVI.

FORTUNE'S WHEEL.

THERE was a long pause between the two men at the conclusion of the ex-naval officer's recital, and at last Barnacle Ben said:

"A wonderful story, truly, sir, and a grievous one for me! But tell me, do you not think it possible that Captain Death may have already overtaken the lieutenant, and even at this moment," with a shudder, "have the young ladies in his possession?"

"I think it just possible, but far from probable," was the reply. "Unrivaled sailor as the Azrael is said to be, I doubt if she could have yet had time to overtake Manners's cutter, even with a better knowledge of her movements than I possessed, which Captain Death certainly did not have."

"Still, his name has been the terror of the island-pecked seas for years I understand. He would be more likely to form a valuable judgment as to Manners's most probable intentions than you or I."

"True. But, for all that, I have a strong impression that he cannot yet have intercepted him."

"Of course," observed the commander of the Sea Scout, after another pause, "I shall myself at once take up this pursuit."

"Naturally you will find that more congenial than even taking British prizes for the time being. The young ladies—"

"One of whom is my sister, the other my betrothed!"

"Ah, I had surmised that there must be a betrothal between you and Mistress Lord."

"And yet you continued this perilous and thankless sea-chase in her behalf!"

"And why not? As I said before, I considered it a matter of personal honor on my own part."

This was said with much simplicity, and in an every-day, matter-of-fact tone.

Barnacle Ben grasped the other's hand with a fervent grip.

"Sir, you are a true gentleman, a noble man!" he exclaimed, not without emotion. "In your exceptional action in this romantic quest you have striven to perform a chivalrous deed, and—Well," blurtingly, "I never thought it possible for me to come to thanking a Britisher as I wish to thank you."

"Oh, come now, that's all right, you know, my dear fellow. And, for my part, I am glad

to know and like you as I find you. Though, demnit, man! Candor compels me to add that I wish you were not a privateersman, preying upon my country's commerce."

"Least said soonest mended, I suppose, on that score," with an expressive gesture. "You are welcome to continue the search in my company on the Sea Scout, Mr. Scudder, though I suppose there is no use in making the offer."

"No, no; much obliged, of course; but then, being an Englishman, couldn't think of it, you know. By the way, I suggest we summon my polite skipper to his own table to crack another bottle of his own wine with us. Ha, ha, ha! Odd situation, isn't it? Then we can go our several ways with cheerful feelings all round, you know."

This suggestion was acted upon, and shortly after that Captain Harrup returned to his own ship.

He kept the brig in sight till nightfall, as a continued protection against the possible return of the pirate, and then, there being not another sail in sight, she was left to continue her course to Jamaica, while the Sea Scout sheeted away to the northeast.

At a consultation which he that evening had with his mates, and at which Boatswain Jack Blackwell's attendance was also requested, Barnacle Ben related the story which he had obtained so unexpectedly.

All finally agreed that, in addition to looking out for prizes, the chief object of the remainder of the cruise should be the rescue of Mercy Lord and Mary Harrup, and that to this end both Manners's cutter and Captain Death's pirate schooner must be considered as the game to be sailed down.

"I am impressed with the idea that the pirate should be our primary pursuit," said Captain Ben. "From what Scudder told me, I am satisfied the young women would be in greater danger of insult if in his power than in that of the harum-scarum lieutenant. And the wiping out of the accused Azrael would be a praiseworthy deed in the interests of humanity on general principles."

"That touches the shot!" cried Silas Martin emphatically, while both Hobby and Simmons nodded their approval. "A Britisher, for instance, is a cuss only to be hated and fought when you are at war with him. But, on the other hand, a pirate—well, a pirate's a pirate, who ought to be knocked into eternal, everlasting smash by whatsoever nationality chances to get the best of him; and I rather think the Sea Scout is just the sort of a bird to swoop upon this particular breed of sea-rattlesnake and rip it into ribbons with her claws."

But Jack Blackwell gloomily shook his head.

"The chief go, I take it," said he, looking at Ben, "is the rescue of our sweethearts? Am I right?"

"Of course you are, Jack."

"Then," with an oath, "I am for running down that infernal hound Manners first, and going a-pirate-hunting afterward, if needs be."

"But look you, Jack, can't you understand that it's a case of hunting a hunter, the Azrael being already on the track of Manners, doubtless with the intention of dispossessing him?"

"Oh!"

"Yes; that is it. And as Captain Death put off to-day on the course we are pursuing—that is, for the Caribbees, his favorite haunt, and with all other points to choose from—I think that he is on the lookout for Manners in that direction, and that we can't do better than follow his example."

"But Mr. Scudder, you say, is in hopes of overtaking the scoundrel Jamaica ways?"

"Truly; but I would sooner follow the pirate's guesswork on the matter than his."

"So would I!" cried Hobby. "There is probably not a league of these seas that the corsair is not familiar with. And then think of the possibility of rescuing the young ladies and wiping out the Azrael at almost the same swoop!"

"All right, then!" acquiesced the boatswain. "Anything suits me, so that that blasted hound Manners is brought to law, and the girls rescued."

"See what an odd thing the wheel of fortune is!" philosophized the young captain. "Could any stranger turn of it be imagined than that which brought Scudder's information to our understandings to-day? Another whirl of the wheel may bring Manners quite as unexpectedly under our lee; and yet again—But we sha'n't gain much by trying to fathom the unknowable. The Caribbees be it then, and may luck attend us."

But after a whole fortnight's cruise up and down that portion of the Spanish Main, not a trace of pirate or cutter was found, though seven fat British West Indiamen were added to the long list of the Sea Scout's prizes, and sent off to Brest in the charge of prize crews.

Then, when as near as could be determined, the privateer was somewhere midway between the Caribbee chain and the Lesser Antilles, there swooped down upon her from the northeast such a tempest as was altogether new to her privateering experience.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE STORM.

By noon of the second day of the tempest, it had increased to such fury that it was gravely debated whether it would be necessary to throw overboard the guns in order to keep the privateer afloat.

It was at last decided to weather it out, or go down with cannons undisturbed.

"A privateer without guns!" Barnacle Ben had cried, in his desperation. "As well think of a fighting man without legs and hands! Better sink as we are, with our glory fresh and undimmed upon us, than become the prey of the first armed Britisher that would come upon us, broken, crippled and weaponless, with a yard-arm noose in prospect for every man jack of us—for let it not be forgotten that we are still without our *letter of marque*."

This had silenced Martin and Simmons, who had earnestly counseled the lightening the vessel at the expense of her armament, while Hobby had as earnestly sided with the young commander in the grim determination to hold out to the last.

Soon after this decision had been made both the main and the mizzen masts went by the board, and after the wreckage had been cleared away, the vessel rode the waves so much easier that every one was encouraged.

"I'd have ordered 'em cut away, if they hadn't gone by the board," said the young skipper. "Better without a couple of masts than without any fighting tools at all, I'm telling you. The former can be replaced at Martinique or elsewhere."

But the storm continued with unabated violence, and the numerous crew were put to their utmost to keep the Sea Scout a-dance over the mountainous billows, superb sea-boat though she was.

It was almost dark at midday: the wind came in roaring, howling gusts out of the bosom of the east; the thunder and lightning were no less incessant than appalling; and the oldest veterans aboard averred that the seas were the most stupendous of their experience; and there were those among them, too, who had battled the proverbial tempests at the doubling of Cape Horn and in the great South Indian Ocean.

Rain accompanied the gale almost without cessation, rain that was rather like a precipitated deluge than as rain is known in temperate climes, though there were occasional breaks in the downpour when for a brief space the wind, the waves and the night-like obscurity would have it all to themselves in the elemental war.

At last, in the course of one of these intervals, the tired lookout in the fore cross-trees took advantage of a short lull in the roar to yell out, excitedly:

"Ship ahoy! And, my God! she's right onto us!"

The next instant she came careering by within biscuit-toss—a splendid schooner under half-sail, with every spar standing, all trim as at a pleasureing—a toy of the billow-tops, and yet a fearless toy.

Lights were agleam here and there like glow-worms, and she came so near that her men could be seen standing alert at their quarters, but seemingly with phantom-like indifference as to the howling of the storm.

"By Jupiter!" exclaimed Barnacle Ben, fairly amazed; "she cares no more for this tempest than if she were charmed. Can it be the Flying Dutchman itself?"

"Worse than that!" replied Miles Hobby's voice at his elbow, while there came a great electric flash. "Look!"

No need for the bidding—there was the name standing out on the beautiful storm-phantom's stern, brightened by the momentary flash into letters of fire, and that name—AZRAEL.

At the same instant, and in the same flash, a wild white face appeared framed in one of the cabin dead-lights, a white hand, in a fluttering dark sleeve of lace-like material, was waved out to the young commander above the phantom's foaming wake, and one word, the young man's name, was shrieked out:

"Benjamin!"

Then flash, apparition and schooner alike were gone amid the fury and the darkness.

"God of heaven!" faltered Ben, in a sort of agony, and, letting go his grip on the tiller-lashings by which he was maintaining his equilibrium on the reeling deck, he put his hand to his eyes; "was that reality that I saw, or only a cheat of the senses?"

"It was no cheat!" said a deep voice, the voice of Jack Blackwell, at his side. "I saw it, too. Mercy Lord and Mary Harrup are in the hands of Captain Death, the Pirate of the Spanish Main!"

Here the privateer staggered as if she had received a hammer-stroke in the bow, and she plunged into an abysmal trough of the sea.

Then, as she slowly quivered in her noble buoyancy, there came whooping and curling toward her prow such a mountain wall of water that the stoutest heart whose owner caught sight of it quailed.

"Hold hard!" bellowed the second mate through his trumpet. "It's coming aboard!"

Then the vessel's nose plunged into the mass,

and her decks were momentarily buried waist-deep in the rushing foam.

Barnacle Ben made an instinctive snath at the lashings he had so carelessly relinquished.

He missed them.

"Man overboard!" he yelled, at the top of his lungs, and was the next moment swept out to sea.

Rising to the surface, he caught just one glimpse of the lantern at the gaff and was then alone amid the storm-night of the furious sea.

Something hard struck him an all but disabling stroke in the shoulder and then tossed restlessly at his side.

It was a hencoop.

In a moment he had laid hold of it and was safe from instantaneous drowning for the time being, but no more.

"Fortune's wheel, indeed!" muttered the castaway, hazily recalling his whilom remark upon that insubstantial point. "Here is a turn of it with a vengeance! Poor Mercy! poor Mary! I fancy you are lost, together with myself."

But *nil desperandum!*

Scarcely had he been immersed before, apparently at all events, the ink-black of the heavens began to give way to a lighter hue.

As a matter of fact, this soon became unmistakable, and then he made out the outlines of a bulky, rounded object that seemed to be tossing helplessly up and down the hills and hollows of the great seas, and yet with some sort of intelligent movement, accompanied by a wheezing, spluttering noise.

"Helloa!" shouted Ben, at the top of his voice; "what is that?"

"Ach, mein Gott!" sputtered a familiar voice in connection with the rolling bulk; "was dot un sberrit of der storm, ain't it?"

"What, Van, you?" shouted Ben, rather selfishly rejoicing at the moment to find himself companioned in adversity. "Here you are—lay hold of the other side of this coop."

It really proved to be the Dutch steward, who made haste to avail himself of the friendly offer, though it was difficult to imagine how he could have sunk under any circumstances, so great was his corpulence.

"Mein Gott, is dot really yourselluf?" gasped the Dutchman.

"I should say so!" was the response. "Where were you when that big wave came whooping aboard?"

"I toan'd know, gaptain. Ach! but a little more und I vould haf trownded."

"What! with all that blubber-padding of yours? No more than a blown bladder or a newly-struck whale."

"Perhaps not! perhaps not, gaptain! Oh, poor Anak!"

"What of Anak? Was he swept over, too?"

"I dinks so, gaptain. He was crabbing holt off dere zame rope mit me."

Here there was a shout to leeward, and they perceived clinging to a small boat that was bottom-side up a Herculean figure, which proved to be the negro cook himself.

"That you, Anak?" bawled Ben.

"De same ole coon, Marse Ben!" was the shouted response. "What, you overboard, too, Marse Ben? Swim ober heah to dis boat."

"No, thank you! This old hencoop is doing pretty well by us so far. However, stick where you are, my man. We may be able to right that boat among the three of us presently."

"I got my hooks on her, Marse Ben," was the cheery reply. "Nebber fear for dis coon."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE DESERT ISLE.

LUCKILY the water was very warm, so that there was very little danger of the castaways becoming benumbed.

Their chief peril was from exhaustion through the frequency of the great seas toppling over upon them before they could quite surmount the foamy crests.

But by this time the skies had materially lightened up, while it soon became evident that the wind was abating its violence, with a prospect of a speedy subsidence of the waves.

At last, and almost as if by magic, the dense envelope of storm-cloud was rifted in the west, and the sun, probably within a couple of hours of his setting, came bursting through with a dazzling flood of glory over the weltering and tumultuous waste.

It was the first time within two whole days that they had seen his splendid face, and instinctively the three castaways burst into a sort of cheer.

They had now been in the water for something over an hour.

Suddenly Anak was observed to shift his grip higher up on the boat's bottom, at the same time giving utterance to an exclamation.

"What is it?" cried Ben.

"My hoof done struck ag'in' something, Marse Ben," was the response. "Gorry mighty! de foot am almos' bruk. 'Spect it war a shark's back."

"No it wasn't!" cried the young skipper. "There; my foot scraped something, too. By Jupiter! it's sand."

Upon mounting the next crest, they now

looked eagerly about them in the hope of desrying land.

But, owing to the tumultuousness of the bilows, nothing was yet to be discerned but the bewildering watery waste.

However, a few minutes later on there came to their ears a roaring sound other than the irregular splashing and clashing of the great seas one against another.

"Breakers, sure pop!" cried Ben, in fresh excitement; "and not very far away at that. Look you, my men; we must try to get that boat righted, if possible. Otherwise, we may have our legs broken by the next reef they scrape against."

This they all set about doing, and at last, after many futile attempts, they succeeded in accomplishing it.

Not only was the boat uninjured, but an oar was found to be firmly lashed on each inner side of the gunwales.

Greatly encouraged, Barnacle Ben was the first to clamber into her, while the two others steadied the little craft, one clinging waist-deep on each side.

He had lost his hat, but Anak had retained his tarpaulin, which proved useful in bailing out, and presently all three were on board, with the oars in use.

Then Anak suddenly pointed away to the southeast, shouting eagerly:

"Dere it am—land—an island!"

This was true, and they all clasped hands over it in common congratulation, while Anak, who was the least exhausted of the trio, grasped the oars and began to row.

The island did not seem more than two miles away at the furthest, and, as the waves had by this time subsided appreciably, there was an excellent prospect of keeping afloat and eventually reaching the shore.

Captain Ben's attention had already been called to the boat itself, and he now examined it more critically.

"Where can the little craft have come from?" he exclaimed. "A strange wreck must have taken place, for assuredly this boat never belonged to the Sea Scout."

Vanderspiegel suddenly called attention to the oars, and Anak stopped rowing that Captain Ben might examine them.

Deeply stamped on the stock of each oar was the name Azrael.

"She couldn't have been wrecked!" observed the young skipper. "As well think of the Phantom Ship herself going down as that devil's craft, from the way she feathered along on those billow-tops in passing. However, she might none the less have had the boat swept off. Give way, Anak!"

The island proved to be a miserable enough one when they approached it.

A mere sand-bank, apparently a mile or two long, with a hummock of wretched-looking cocoanut trees in the center, and lying so low that it seemed a wonder that the great waves had not long since broken completely over and washed it out of existence, instead of merely hammering away upon its desert beach.

However, this was presently explained by the presence of a girdle of coral reef, through which a passage was at last found only with the greatest difficulty, and a little later on the landing upon the beach was effected.

But even at his expiring the sun beat down upon the sands with intense, scorching heat, and the castaways were already tortured with thirst.

They went up into the scant shade afforded by the cocoanut trees, and here Anak, after looking around him for a moment, gave a grunt of satisfaction.

"Look!" he cried, pointing to a suggestion of marshiness in the middle of the hummock, where some coarse grasses were growing in a dish-like basin whose sandiness was of a darker, moister hue than its immediate surroundings.

"Now see!"

He was naked, save as to his tarpaulin and a pair of duck trowsers.

Discarding these lingering remains of civilization, so that he stood stark nude, he ran into the center of this shallow basin, whose surface yielded slightly under his tread, and, leaping high into the air, he came down his full length and on the flat of his back.

Then, springing lightly up again, he pointed triumphantly to the impression which had been made, and which was observed to be slowly filling with water.

They lost no time in slaking their thirst when enough of the water had been collected, and were greatly refreshed, notwithstanding that it was of a somewhat brackish taste.

"Guinea niggers know a heap!" guffawed Anak. "Dey don't wear dem t'ings when sun scorch."

And, having resumed his tarpaulin, he contemptuously kicked the discarded trowsers, which, however, on Barnacle Ben's insistence, he presently put on again.

Then the sun went down into the sea, and night fell with the suddenness of its descent upon the world in those tropic climes, there being none of the lingering and beautiful half-light before its final closing in, such as we of the North

are accustomed to: and, throwing themselves upon the sands under the brilliancy of the Southern stars, the castaways slept the sleep of exhaustion upon the desert isle.

By the following morning the storm had entirely ceased.

Long, glassy swells had taken the place of the tumult that had so recently torn the ocean's breast, the sun came up looking like a ball of molten silver, glittering, scorching, and the storm of the previous day was nothing more than the faintest zephyr upon the heated brow.

They got some more water, but were now ravenously hungry, but little food having been eaten on the previous day by reason of anxiety over the ship's safety.

"Wait!" said Anak, who seemed to be full of suggestions in these trying emergencies. "Me hear something roar an' beller before sun up. Elephant, eh? River-horse, no? Well, sea-cow anyhow. Come!"

He led the way down to a section of the beach where long, waving, coarse grasses extended out into the water, where their green tops, intermingled with sea-weed, were softly waved to and fro by the gentle come and go of the lagune-water inside the reef.

"Give me knife!" He unceremoniously took out of Van's belt a long carving-knife which the Dutchman had managed to retain in its sheath.

"Now wait! now see!"

With that, the giant negro slowly waded out among the weeds and grasses, every now and then pausing to watch and listen.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A FRESH ASTONISHER.

SUDDENLY Anak was seen to pause, when about thigh-deep in the water, while clutching the knife strongly.

Then he leaped about, yelling vociferously; there was a floundering splash about his legs, and it was evident that he was attacking something in the water.

Now and then he would be half out of sight, his knife rose and fell, and the water, churned into a foam, began to grow red.

"Mein Gott! vot a mans!" exclaimed Vanderspiegel; "it musd pe dat he ish shopping up von zhark do bieces, or der zhark may pe shopping oop him do bieces."

"No; it's a manatee!" cried Ben. "Don't you remember those we saw at Martinique? There; and he's got the fish, too!"

"Yes; a manatee, or river-cow, it really proved to be—a large and fat one, nearly four feet long and correspondingly bulky, which the negro was now lugging in to shore.

He laid the odd-looking creature its length upon the sand, where it slowly breathed its last from the numerous deep stabs it had received.

"Now, wait!" Anak said again, pardonedly proud over his victory. "Here, Van," returning the knife. "Cut up steaks. No fire? Wait and see."

He went back up into the grove, as it might be called in irony, the others dragging up the carcass of the manatee after him.

Here it was not long before the clever black produced fire by the primitive method of friction between two pieces of wood with improvised tinder attached.

Steaks of the manatee were broiled after a fashion at the camp-fire that was subsequently built; the flesh proved fairly palatable under the circumstances; and there the castaways were at last, with their stomachs full, their thirst slaked: and yet alone upon that mere sand-speck of the Caribbean Sea, apparently sailless, boundless, unpitying and irremediable in its glassy, embosoming embrace.

After exploring the island thoroughly—it was merely a few square miles of sand, save for the cluster of cocoa trees and a few patches of wild sea-grass, as has already been hinted—Barnacle Ben said, with his accustomed energy:

"Look here, friends, it will never do to remain here, if there is any means of bettering ourselves."

"Dot ish de dark!" acquiesced the rotund Dutchman, phlegmatically. "Ve would zoon pe deader dan crowbars, pesides peing gooked und paked alife like vrying-pans in a fish."

Anak, for his part, only shook his head and grinned.

So far as the sun's heat was concerned, he seemed to rather like it, besides appearing to be little discommoded generally.

"No passing ship would ever be likely to sight this God-forsaken bank," continued Ben, reflectively. "But it ought to be only a chain of similar ones, on some other of which we might stand a better chance. This, I think, can scarcely be one of those isolated sand-specks on which, according to report, the pirates occasionally maroon their prisoners or their mutinous comrades."

Anak stretched out his arms with a helpless gesture, until his eye chancing to fall upon the larger of the cocoanut trees, he ran to it, slapping its straight, smooth stem with his strong black hands.

"See, Marse Ben!" he cried, with his inevitable grin. "Mast-head good lookout! Cocoanut no good the same? Why not?"

"Good!" said Ben, brightening up. "One

could probably have a wide view from up there amid the feathery leaves and clustering nuts, if one could only shin his way up, which is hardly probable."

"Wait! Anak lib among cocoanuts before. Now, see!"

The next instant he began to make his way up along the stem in the most extraordinary manner.

That is, hand over hand, with his palms clasped behind the trunk, against which the soles of his naked feet were also firmly pressed, his knees meantime sticking out sharply at right angles, bowed like hairpins, and his body describing an S-like arch for the most part, though with every muscle sinuously active and alert as the ascending movement was safely and rapidly effected.

A tree-toad could hardly have accomplished the feat more readily or with less labor.

Both Ben and the Dutchman set up a cheer when the gaunt negro was seen to have at last reached a comfortable perch in the very heart of the broad-leaved tree-top, from which he almost immediately began to tear off and hurl down the nuts.

These were full of their delicious milk which, on being sucked through holes punched into the nuts' eyes, proved to be both delicious and invigorating.

"Hurrah!" Ben shouted up to Anak; "this beats the manatee all hollow. What sort of a lookout have you?"

"Bad!" came back the response. "But wait, Marse Ben. Leaves too many."

Then they saw him begin to tear off and throw down the great leaf-fronds one by one.

After he had pretty thoroughly thinned out the umbrella-like top, they saw him looking away in various directions, while shading his eyes with his disengaged hand, but for a long time there was no other response.

"Almosht ash goot as Schiedam schnapps!" fatly observed Van while regaling himself on the contents of about his twentieth cocoanut, a heap of unpunctured fruit lying at one side of his squatting position in the sand, another pile of the exhausted shells rising on the other side. "Mein Gott! it peats vater den to vun!"

"Be careful you don't make yourself sick with a surfeit," advised Barnacle Ben, laughing. "The three that I drank out did me good, whereas a fourth might have given me the belly-ache."

"Sick of dis shweet shtuff!" echoed the Dutchman, complacently puncturing a fresh nut with the point of his big knife, while drawing a long, wheezing breath. "Ach! I coot trink a parrel unt efen den be dirdsy for anoder hocksheat!"

Here there was a shout from high overhead, and both looked up expectantly.

Then came the information from Anak to the effect that there was but one other island in sight, and that was a mere blurred dot on the horizon line, twenty or thirty miles to southward.

"That will do!" Barnacle Ben called back to him. "Come down, Anak. Any port in a storm. We'll row out for that solitary speck, anyway. It may at least serve as a lookout for better prospects ahead."

Half an hour later they were pulling away to southward in their little boat, after taking the precaution to fill it as high as it would hold with fresh cocoanuts, together with the shells of those that had been exhausted, after filling them with brackish water, and then plugging them up in the manner of improvised flasks or little jugs.

As they neared the island, suffering meanwhile from the fierco downpour of the torrid sun, it was seen to be even more desolate than the one they had abandoned, and absolutely devoid of any vegetation, though somewhat higher in the middle.

At last Anak, whose eyes were better than the others, suddenly called out, after a brief observation:

"Man on sand-heap! See! dead or 'live? Who knows?"

True; for his companions likewise perceived the figure presently—that of a man, motionlessly seated on the backbone of the bank, apparently gazing hopelessly away to the south.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Ben; "like enough it's some rascal marooned on this horrible sand-speak by his fellow-cut-throats. However—head on, it is!"

And, it being his own stint at the oars, he once more bowed to his work.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE MAROONED MAN.

THEY made their landing with less difficulty than in the former instance, selecting the nearest beach, which was to the north.

As this was done, the solitary figure was temporarily hidden from view by the inequalities of the bank, which seemed to have been shifted here or there according to the caprice of wind and wave.

After securing their boat, they silently ascended the slight eminence of the interior sand-drift.

It was now the middle of the afternoon, and the sun was blistering hot almost beyond bear-

ing, notwithstanding that all three had provided themselves with improvised hats of cocoa-nut leaves, which in some measure protected their heads, or the consequences might have been fatal, at least for the two whites.

At last they surmounted the ridge, and once more had the solitary figure in view.

Then they made a halt, observing him silently and with profound commiseration.

The man's back was still turned to them, and, though there were not wanting indications that he was alive, he still sat there like a graven image, an image of despair, with his eyes staring hopelessly from under the brim of his huge Panama hat across the glassy mirror-like expanse of the vastness to the south.

A tiny water-keg, evidently empty, together with a canvassack, out of whose flattened mouth some strewn fragments of coarse biscuit appeared, and an old musket, lying at his side, told plainly enough of the sarcastic charity that had accompanied the marooning tragedy.

And yet something in the man's garb—which was shrunken and wrinkled, as if it had undergone a tremendous drenching, probably by the recent storm, and then dried upon his person—seemed inconsistent with his having been part of a pirate crew.

Barnacle Ben at last called out to the man.

The latter started, as if terrified, and then, rising painfully to his feet, turned.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, in a hollow, scarcely coherent voice, and at the same time lifting up his gaunt arms with a gesture of thanksgiving; "men, real men, and not ghosts, here with me on this hell's speck of the remorseless waves, this—"

Then the words seemed to hang fire upon his parched lips, he brushed his hat off and staggered back, glaring at Barnacle Ben.

The latter was scarcely less astounded, his recognition of the other having been instantaneous, notwithstanding the frightful emaciation of the once youthful, handsome and dare-devil face, now covered with a straggling beard like that of an unshaven corpse.

"Manners!" exclaimed the young skipper.

"Ben—Barnacle Ben!" gasped the other; "my enemy—the man I have wronged. My God! their vengeance was not quite complete."

Then he once more sunk to the ground feebly, covering his head again from the fierce sunshine with a trembling hand, sobbing like a child.

Even Barnacle Ben's resentment, terrible as it had been treasured against this young man, was disarmed for the time being by his deplorable condition.

"I had meant to kill you!" he said, solemnly. "But I wouldn't take advantage of even a snake in the miserable plight I find you in."

Manners merely extended his emaciated arms supplicatingly, without raising his face.

"Water!" he gasped, huskily.

At a sign from Ben the negro tendered the sufferer one of several water-filled cocoanut-shells he had brought with him from the boat.

It was drained eagerly, and another and yet another, while the drinker drew a long, ecstatic sigh.

"Thanks—may Heaven bless you!" he murmured. "Ah, Sarcasm of Fate! that I should be beholden to the man I have so deeply injured for this relief. It was like a draught of ice in my blistering insides. One more—one more, for the love of Heaven!"

"Get up, if you can, Manners!" cried Barnacle Ben, at last, when the sufferer had quenched his thirst in full, "and answer my questions."

The young man rose more briskly than before, but still with some exertion, and bowed his head submissively.

"You were doubtless captured by the pirate, Captain Death?" was the beginning of the inquisition.

"Yes."

"And he took the young ladies from your custody?"

"Together with all that I possessed—cutter, money, valuables—everything but the cutter's small boat, in which they marooned me on this horrible reef the same day, after flinging my little crew to the sharks. They even left me the boat, but it was blown away from me in the first night of the great storm."

"Ah! it is doubtless the same boat that came to us so fortunately."

Manners looked amazed, and then walked a few steps away to a point from which he could command the spot where they had landed.

"It is the same!" he exclaimed. "Heavens, how wonderful, how little short of miraculous! And then he added, in a changed and peculiar voice: "My boat—yes, my own boat!"

"How long ago did this happen?" was Barnacle Ben's next demand.

"Four days back—in the early morning that preceded the great storm."

"So! but look here; is there no species of shelter whatever on this accursed reef? My brain is fairly baking in my skull."

"Yes; there is such a shelter—only one." He pointed in the direction by which they had come. "I will take you there."

He led the way, frequently stopping to look curiously at the boat, around the beach at which she was moored toward the east.

The sand-heaps grew more rugged as they proceeded.

Presently they heard the dash of waves, and he came at last to a pause before a shallow grotto of coral formation, with a sandy floor partly covered by the incoming tide.

Miserable hole that it was, it was yet provided with a sort of roof against the scorching beams.

Followed by the rest, Ben staggered into the grotto with a grateful sigh, and, throwing himself on the sand, bathed his head in the clear sea-water.

They all followed his example. Then they took a swim in the lagune, with a sharp lookout for sharks. After that, Anak brought from the boat a heap of fresh cocoanuts and improvised water-holders, together with some of the manatee flesh which had baked dry in the sun without spoiling. After the contents of the nuts and shells had been cooled by an immersion in the brine, they were partaken of, together with such of the fish as could be eaten, though most of it had become very leathery.

Manners had revived greatly in a physical way, but seemed still so morose and unhappy that Ben decided to forbear any further questioning for the time being.

Still, when they were all feeling comparatively comfortable, he looked at the deadly glare of the sun, now near his setting, and said:

"When you knew of such a shelter as this, how could you have exposed yourself in the manner that we surprised you in? I cannot understand it."

The marooned man looked up with a start, as if aroused by the words out of a gloomy reverie.

"Excuse me, sir," he replied, falteringly, "but were you addressing anything to me?"

"Yes," and Ben repeated his words.

"Oh, but that is simple!" was the reply. "I was looking off to that island to the south, you see." Then, cutting himself short, as if in an unwitting piece of information, he added, hurriedly: "The south is the most likely quarter to expect a sail from, you know. Besides, even the baking sunshine was preferable to the horror of moping in this hole alone."

Barnacle Ben looked at him critically for several moments, his breast the theater of many conflicting emotions.

"So there is an island to the southward, eh?" he asked, quietly.

"Island!"

And the castaway looked up with a stare.

"Yes, yes!" half angrily. "You said as much, though, to be sure, it seemed like an unwary slip of the tongue."

Manners passed his hand over his brow so bewilderedly that Ben blamed himself for the new suspicions that had been forming in his mind.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"A BRUISED SERPENT IS A SERPENT STILL."

"TAKE your time," said the young privateer-man, commiseratingly. "You are probably still all abroad in a great measure. Yes; you did say there was an island to the southward."

"Why, of course there is!" replied the marooned, with a confused laugh. "Yes, yes; a mere speck, but it is there."

"Come and point it out to us before the sun quite disappears."

Slowly and wearily Manners arose and conducted them once more to the central eminence, whence he indicated the object of which he had spoken.

Yes, sure enough; though but a dim speck upon the southern sea-line, it was stationary and unchangeable.

"Big island, good island!" cried Anak. "Me know. Cocoanut plenty, water plenty, everything plenty! Fine island!"

"I only hope so," said Manners, gloomily, "now that there is a chance of reaching it—that is, if you won't refuse to take me along?" And he looked at Barnacle Ben strangely.

"Don't fear that you'll be left here to roast and starve—bad as you are," responded the privateer-man, coldly. "We're not of that sort!"

"Oh!" cried Manners, with sudden wildness; "how I have lived—groaning, torturingly enough, but still lived—on the sight of that island-speck during the horror of my solitude here on this accursed spot! A sail might have come and gone, risen and sunk; but there it remained, a hope and yet a despair, a blessing and yet a torment. My God! how I have suffered!" And he clasped his temples piteously.

"V' y not shet shail unt vly away at vunce all der dimes?" the fat Dutchman suddenly cried out with unexpected enthusiasm. "Hooray vor efferyt'ng! Come along, you vellers!"

"A good suggestion!" exclaimed Barnacle Ben, laughing. "Come along, then, it is! No time like the present!"

But as he started to lead the way back to the boat, he reeled, caught his head with his hands, and would have fallen but for Anak's support.

"You must rest—you couldn't stand it yet," said Manners, sympathetically. His face had suddenly darkened at the Dutchman's sugges-

tion, though without the others noticing it. "Besides, look here; have you a compass among you?"

"I guess I am overtaxed for the present," Ben admitted. "My head is like a beehive. However, the sun is half gone, and a breeze is already springing up. I shall be better soon. No; unfortunately we have not a compass among us."

"It is unfortunate," Manners observed, assuming an extra gloomy look. "For of course it would be madness to attempt to row that distance by night, and without a compass."

"Well, it would be risky, but no more than risky."

"I should say so; besides, the temptation is great to avoid the sun's scorching by a night trip. But then without a compass!—a distance of fifty miles, at least, with no telling how the wind might come up at this season."

"True; safer to risk the scorching by day."

Manners brightened up, seemingly in spite of himself.

"By the way, I'm awfully thirsty again," he said. "I wonder if I might have the milk out of another of your cocoanuts."

"Of course; the boat is still more than half-full of them, together with water-shells. We'll all take a snack at them, and then go to bed in the grotto. Then at daybreak, southward ho!"

This plan was carried out, our castaways no sooner stretching themselves out in the grotto, a little later on, than they were lapped in the sleep of complete exhaustion.

When Barnacle Ben awoke just at the first faint streaks of a new day, he was surprised to perceive that the place on the sandy floor which Manners had occupied was empty.

"See if he is on the hill-top," he lazily instructed Anak, who was likewise sitting up. "Or he may be draining another cocoanut down at the boat; I feel thirsty myself."

Anak obediently quitted the grotto, while Ben awakened Vanderspiegel, whose snoring was rather more powerful than mellifluous.

They were exchanging some words when the negro came bounding back as if winged.

"Boat!" he yelled; "gone! Cocoanut! gone! Englishman! gone! Ebberything gone, gone!"

Ben was out of the grotto with a spring, even Van rolling after him with an unwonted celerity of motion.

Manners could be seen just outside the coral reef, rowing calmly around the island, preparatory to heading southward *alone*.

He had not left behind even so much as an unsucked nut or an improvised flask with water in it.

"Good-by, my American friends!" the villain called back across the reef-belt and the lagune. "Try the marooning business awhile yourselves! By the way, I have a pocket-compass, if you haven't."

Anak uttered a maniacal yell, and, snatching Van's knife, dashed out into the lagune, with murder written on his black face; while the Dutchman stamped upon the sands like an enraged hippopotamus.

"No use, no use!" cried Barnacle Ben, staggering back with a stony look. "We were the fools to trust him and this is the penalty. Once a snake always a snake; and the bruised serpent is the serpent still!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

ABANDONED.

BUT it was too late.

Anak, who could swim like a fish, and might possibly have defeated the traitor's intention, was intercepted by a shark before he could reach the reef-belt.

Barnacle Ben and Vanderspiegel could only gaze helplessly at the villain who was so heartlessly abandoning them to their fate, and to the negro's heroic combat with the shovel-nosed monster of the lagune.

The latter was soon over, inasmuch as Anak, who was little short of being amphibious, speedily succeeded in diving under his finny foe and ripping him from end to end with his keen knife.

After that he gained the reef, but too late to think of overtaking the thief of the boat, who was already far out in deep water with the drag of the outgoing tide, while rowing at his leisure.

Ben signaled the negro to return, as he was fearful he might be tempted to a still further and more useless swim out into the shark-infested sea.

The signal was sullenly obeyed, the recrossing of the lagune being effected by Anak without further adventure.

Then, without the exchange of a word, the three miserably-duped men slowly, heavily toiled up the eminence of sand, whence they watched the receding boat until it was a mere speck upon the smooth mirror of the sea.

Each then hesitated to speak, or even exchange looks, so appallingly-horrible was the fate that had come to stare them in the face.

Abandoned, without food or water upon that desolate, sun-blistered sand-speck of the tropical ocean, what indeed was left them but the torture-death of the marooned bravof—slow, silent, agonizing death by hunger and thirst!

Each sunk into an attitude of hopelessness, much the same as that in which they had first come upon the abandoned wretch who had abandoned them in turn so fiendishly; that is, seated on the hot sand, knees drawn up almost to the chin, listless arms folded across, the eyes hopelessly, stonily fixed upon the remorseless sea.

At last, however, Ben recovered his nerve sufficiently to take a more general survey of the situation.

What was this? It was full daylight, but the scorching sun-blaze of the preceding day was not there.

He looked aloft. Why, it was cloudy! Then he remembered that the periodical rainy season of the latitude was not yet at an end.

A drop fell upon his hand, then another. He sprung to his feet.

"Get up, comrades, get up!" he cried, with a fierce laugh. "We sha'n't die of thirst in a hurry, at all events. Behold! God is merciful, and it rains, it rains!"

They required no second bidding to imitate his example in leaping to their feet.

It was no dream!

Not only was the sunshine absent, but the heavens were momentarily blackening, thunder muttered in the clouds, the few drops had become a sprinkle, the sprinkle became a rain, the rain a downpour, the downpour a cataclysm!

They remained in the falling deluge, running about like crazy men, till saturated in every pore.

It was only when the thunder began to clash and reverberate overhead in a continuous roar, preceded by sheets of lightning of blinding brilliancy amid the rush of rain, that they thought of seeking the shelter of their grotto once again.

Here for awhile they laughed and talked crazily together, as if they might in that manner forget the horrors of their situation, especially with regard to their foodless condition, now that delicious rain-water was so plentiful around them, running and soaking everywhere to prodigal waste.

As before, the young commander was the first to rouse himself out of this senseless and deplorable state.

"Come, no more of this!" he cried at last, springing again to his feet, and shaking his companions in misfortune vigorously, one after the other. "Shall we fight it out to the last gasp like idiots or like men? Rouse, I say! Means must be devised for storing some of this delicious water—the liquid manna of the skies—that is running all to waste; for by to-morrow the sun's blistering deadliness may be upon us once again. We can pine for food later, but now the water, the water must be stored!"

As before, his courageous example was infectious.

They collected all the empty cocoanut shells, of which there were fortunately not a few, and, making little conduits for the rain-water to trickle down into the grotto, filled and plugged them anew.

Then at the suggestion of Anak, whose primitive ingenuity was once more upon the alert, they scraped with their knives (Ben and Van were luckily each provided in this respect) down into the sand at the back of the cave until they had excavated quite a large space out down into the coral bed-rock of the island.

The rock was not hard, though dense and capable of holding water in places.

At last, after immense and persistent toil, in the course of which their knife-blades were more than half worn away, they succeeded in scooping out a water-tight basin in the bed-rock, oval-shaped, three feet long by two broad, and perhaps three feet deep.

It was a primitive cistern, capable of holding perhaps a barrel of water, and sufficiently protected by the overhang of the grotto-roof to be doubtless preserved from evaporation for many days even in the hottest and driest season.

Thus they managed to fill with the rain, by leading a conduit down and around to it from the higher sand-levels over which the downpour was continuing to descend without any appearance of letting up.

Having accomplished this task by, say, the middle of the afternoon, they sat down in the mouth of the grotto, looking stolidly out upon the rain-lashed lagune and sea, and confronted by the second grizzly phantom of the desert isle—Famine—Hunger.

One can soften the pangs, but not for more than a certain time stifle the demands of hunger with drink alone.

Water is still not food, and one still must eat to live.

At last Anak turned to Ben, saying:

"Marse Ben, me want pin, piece wire, piece copper, piece iron—me want piece bad."

Ben wonderingly searched his clothes, and at last produced a small iron hook and staple, which he chanced to find in one of his pockets, without remembering how they had ever got there.

These he tendered to the negro, without asking what he could want of them.

Anak selected the hook alone, while giving back the staple.

Then, turning to the Dutchman, he demanded the loan of the latter's carving-knife—or what was left of it.

Obtaining this also, he said, "Me go, me come back," and stalked out on the beach in the pouring rain.

"V'at gan dot vondervul neecro pe oop to now, gaptain?" asked Vanderspiegel.

"I don't know," replied Ben, gloomily. "Let us wait and see."

Half an hour later, Anak returned and threw a fish, three feet long and still gasping, before them.

He carried with him his fish-line raveled out of his canvas trowsers, armed with the hook Ben had given him.

One finger was roughly wrapped up in a bloody bandage.

He had cut a piece out of it with Van's knife, in order to bait the hook with which he had caught the fish.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HOPES AND FEARS.

"FISH good, man hungry!" said Anak, with his accustomed grin. "Eat—chaw!"

With that he ripped up the fish, dividing the palpitating flesh into three equal or nearly equal portions, which he then distributed, taking the smaller portion for himself.

Even eaten raw, the fish tasted deliciously palatable, the men's hunger had by this time become so ravenous.

Hardly so much as the bones and scales were left after they had in a measure sated their appetites; though the negro carefully put away the entrails for future bait.

Then they "went to bed," the rain still pouring, the thunder crashing at intervals.

The rain continued for the two days following, with scarcely any intermission, and, thanks to Anak's ingenuity, there was more fish—more than they could eat.

Then followed two days of cloudless skies and scorching heat, but with no more fish.

Somehow, the finny prey disdained to bait, though tempted by the most attractive bits of refuse on the most improved hooks he could fashion out of fish-bones, and famine once more stared them in the face.

Then the negro, with Barnacle Ben's assistance, stabbed to death a dolphin that had stranded upon the outer reef, but narrowly escaped death themselves at the instance of the sharks in landing it upon the inner beach.

Nausea and griping pains resulted from the feast that followed till they feared that they were poisoned, though all hands gradually pulled through on a diet of rain-water during another protracted down-pour from the clouds.

So it went on for a period of twenty days, which wound up with a glaring spell that left the castaways on the verge of despair.

Each was emaciated and hollow-eyed to a degree that he would not confess as to his condition, though seeing it reflected every day in his companions' aspects.

One day at the end of this dreadful period, however, Anak, who had been on the Lookout Hill, as they had got to call the little central rise in their ocean-girt sand heap of desolation, walked leisurely into the grotto where his comrades were moping out of the sun's blistering rays, with something like his old-time grin upon his black face.

"Ship!" he said, in a feeble, matter-of-fact tone. "Boat put off! Yah, yah!" cunningly; "we keep hidin. Sha'n't rob us of our island! Not much." Then he squatted down beside them, adding: "Any more bait, Marse Ben? Big gold-fish out in lagune. Nigger may catch him dis time." And then he placed both hands upon his hollow stomach and groaned, after which he broke into a chattering little laugh.

It was not the first indication the poor fellow had given of his mind giving way.

Anak, the brave, the patient, the ingenious Anak! What would they have done without him? And yet his primitive brain had been the first to give signs of yielding to the inevitable collapse that was probably to be the dawning end for one and all.

But now both Barnacle Ben and Vanderspiegel had managed to stare at him with something more than the stupid commiseration and interest than was their wont on being confronted with his vagaries.

"What the deuce do you mean?" growled the young man, with a peevish oath. "Can't you let be, man? Must you forever be seeing phantom sails on the horizon, ships that don't exist in the offing?"

Anak shook his head, and laughed vacantly.

"Hush, Marse Ben!" he continued. "Dey might hear you. What we-uns' mount to if dey take dis island away from us? Ugh! shark git us, shuah! Gib me somet'ing for fish-bait, Marse Ben!" piteously. "Yo' leetle finger mought do, Marse Ben."

"It is too tammt pad!" angrily interjected Van, whose whilom enormous girth now hung about him in folds, and whose temper had been changing for the worse every day. "Ships inter offing! Ach! ships ton'd sail around in hell. Vot you dalk about, you plack nigger, zomedimes all der v'ile?"

Then they got into a weak, puerile dispute among themselves that was more like the wrangle of idiots than anything else.

From this deplorable condition they were suddenly aroused by a coarse voice bawling out from somewhere:

"Halloa! Here, you darky, where did you run off to?"

"Mebbe it wasn't a darky, after all, you thought you made out," cried another voice. "No one could live a day on the blasted marooning sand-bank, I tell you."

By this time the bewildered castaways had hobbled out of the grotto.

It was no dream. The hill-top was covered with a group of sailors—honest-looking English man-o'-war's-men at that—whose yawl was beached near at hand.

Then there was a great, hearty shout, and they had the unfortunates among them; biscuits and grog were being passed around, and their greeting was of that roughly sympathetic kind which is one of the humanizing elements of ocean vicissitudes.

Barnacle Ben was the first to recover from his bewilderment, and he was accordingly guarded in his answers to the queries that were showered upon him.

"They had been cast away from an American bark, whose very name had become hazy, it was so long ago, and their sufferings had been so terrible."

That was all that could be got out of him, and his fellow-unfortunates had just enough common sense remaining to take their cue from his reticence.

They had been rescued by the British sloop-of-war Vixen, which had sent the boat ashore by the merest chance to look for sea-turtle, of which her martinet of a commander was very fond in the form of soup.

That was the whole story. Anak alone made objection at first to being carried off to the ship, continuing to insist that the island was a most desirable possession, of which he for one did not wish to be deprived; but the grog at last wrought a joyous change in him, and he went off with the others, singing and jabbering in a weak and inane way.

On the second day after the rescue, when the unfortunates had in a great measure recovered their strength and nerve under the good treatment that had been accorded them, the commander of the Vixen sent for Barnacle Ben to go to his cabin.

He was a pompous little post-captain, named Armadel, and his first lieutenant was with him in the saloon when Ben entered.

"Come, my man," was Captain Armadel's greeting, in a peremptory but not unkindly tone, "it is about time your memory was improved as to your antecedents. Mr. Whiffers agrees with me as to this—eh, Whiffers?" The lieutenant gravely nodded. "Now, don't you think so yourself? Be seated, though, my man. And, steward, pour out Mr. Hurry-up, as he calls himself, a bumper of claret."

Ben composedly seated himself, drank the wine to Captain Armadel's health, and then admitted that his memory was improved.

"Well, well, take your time," continued the little captain. "Only it's natural, you know, that in this cruise after that infernal privateer, the Sea Scout, and the pirate, Azrael, that we are upon, we should be anxious to obtain all the information handy; and it has been suggested that you might have got wind of one or t'other of 'em before being cast away on that sand-bank. Eh, Mr. Hurry-up?"

Ben bowed, and seemed to be taking time to collecting his thoughts. He had already learned of the chief objects of the Vixen's cruise, and was resolved to be perfectly frank in his admissions, if the outlook should not appear too black against him.

"Not, my man," said Captain Armadel, encouragingly, "that I would insult you by intimating that you might have been really identified with one or another of those accursed vessels. Don't suppose that. I am not forgetting that you are my ship's guest, you know."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE VIXEN SLOOP-OF-WAR.

"CAPTAIN," replied Ben, at last, "I candidly acknowledge that I have formed some acquaintance with the crew of the Sea Scout. May I be so bold as to ask what would be their fate if they should fall into your hands?"

"Fate? Why, the rope, as a matter of course!" burst out Armadel, enthusiastically. "I'd yard-arm every sea-devil of 'em with short shrift!"

"Just the same as if they were the same number of Captain Death's pirates in your hands?"

"Of course, of course!" impatiently. "What would be the difference? Besides, that rascally Sea Scout has no letter-of-marque as yet. Yes, yes; short shrift and the Vixen's yard-arm, as a matter of course."

"Without any preliminary imprisonment or trial?"

"What! for such rascally sea-robbers? The deuce!"

"Tut, tut!" interposed Mr. Whiffers, who was of a less excitable temperament; "that

would never do, Captain Armadel. You wouldn't forget that the privateer has captured many of our officers and men, upon whom her friends could retaliate with a vengeance?"

"Well, well; there is some sense in that," doubtfully. "I suppose I would not treat them quite so summarily as the pirates, you know."

"Of course," continued the lieutenant, "they would have to be treated as prisoners of war until adjudged otherwise by the proper authorities."

"Perhaps so, perhaps so! But, dash it all, man! we mustn't forget that the young devil commanding her is the same who so nearly carried off General Arnold from the Bellerophon. Admiral Howe told me he was certain of it."

"Aw! I believe so. Not such a bad riddance either, in my private opinion."

And Mr. Whiffers made this announcement in an undertone.

"But here! What is the relevance of all this, anyhow?" cried Captain Armadel, bristling up again. "Steward, fill up Mr. Hurry-up's glass. How is your memory by this time, my man?"

"Clear as a bell, sir," replied Ben, laughing, for he had now taken his bearings pretty thoroughly.

"Aha! that is well. Come, then; who and what were you prior to being cast away?"

"Captain Benjamin Harrup, otherwise Barnacle Ben, of the privateer Sea Scout," was the cool and unexpected reply.

The little post-captain fairly bounced in his seat, while even the more self-possessed lieutenant stared.

"You can't mean it?" gasped the former.

"Just that, and nothing else, Captain Armadel. And, if you choose, I'll spin you my yarn right here and now. It's not devoid of interest."

The commander of the Vixen hesitated. Then, ordering the steward to fill the glasses all round, he dismissed him.

"It won't do for my own steward to see me drinking wine with a blasted Yankee privateer-man, you know," he said, half-apologetically. "But I say, Mr. Hurry-up—why didn't I think of Harrup at once, I wonder?—you can spin your yarn, and we shall see what sort of a case you make out for yourself."

Barnacle Ben accordingly told his entiresory, even to the details of his private history, with a frankness and graphic power that was sufficient to fascinate to his hearers.

They were especially struck with the episode of the young ladies in the case, together with the manner in which the ex British naval officers, Scudder and Manners, had become mixed up in the young man's life-romance.

"Gad! it's just wonderful!" exclaimed Armadel, quite forgetful of his accustomed self-importance. "Scudder was a chum of mine on the Arethusa, and a deuced good fellow, too. And, good Lord! to think of that young blood, Geoffrey Dunham, having blossomed out into this infernal Captain Death of the pirate Azrael! It takes one's breath away."

"I find the conduct of Eugene Manners the more abominable!" commented Whiffers. "Know one of his sisters, the Countess of Dashaway, in London, quite well. Good family, but the boy always was a hard case. By Heaven!" with sudden passion; "his running off the young ladies was bad enough, but his conduct toward these three men on the reef—He ought to be hanged on sight, and I'd cheerfully witness the job!"

"Well, ur! I don't know but that I'm one with you there, Whiffers. And then to think of those young ladies at last in Death's hands!"

And thus for some time they kept a running comment upon the salient points in Ben's extraordinary recital.

"Look here, Harrup," said Captain Armadel, at last, "I am going to be very indulgent with you."

"I extend my grateful thanks in advance, dear sir," replied the young man.

"So! but I shall grant you this indulgence on condition that you continue to keep your identity a secret from every one else aboard the sloop."

"I promise you that, sir. What is the favor, pray, in which you would so generously indulge me, Captain Armadel?"

"Why, by jingo!" with a much stronger oath; "I shall neither yard-arm you off-hand on the spot, nor even put you under arrest—at least for the present, you understand."

Barnacle Ben was jocosely profuse in his thanks, and rose to go.

"Hold on, Harrup!" cried Captain Armadel; "I want to ask your judgment on a certain point."

"At your service, captain."

"Frankly, then, what sort of a chance do you think your privateer, Sea Scout, would have in a fair, stand-up, sail-around sea-fight with this ship?"

Barnacle Ben smiled.

"Reverse the manner of your inquiry, Captain Armadel," he replied, good-humoredly, "and I will be able to answer it more tersely."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, make your question as asking me what I think would be your ship's chance in a fight with my privateer, for instance."

"Blast your impudence! However, take it in that way, then."

"Thank you! In my humble opinion, the Sea Scout could outsail, outfight and outwhip you any day in the week."

The little captain was about to explode with real wrath this time when the door opened, and his second lieutenant entered.

"Sail reported on weather bow, sir," he said.

"What do you make of her?"

"Probably large vessel, armed."

"Anything else?"

"Yes, sir; the sailing-master and one or two others are of opinion it's the Sea Scout privateer."

The little captain fired up with battle-ardor, made a sign to Ben to withdraw, and then ascended to the quarter-deck with his officers.

The stranger was about five miles distant, a fine trade-breeze was blowing, and it was soon evident that, far from thinking of retreat, she was heading direct for the Vixen, with a small prize of some sort under her wing.

Ben, Van and Anak stood in a group amidships stolidly watching the stranger, but giving no sign of special interest one way or another.

Presently Captain Armadel again sent for Ben to come to him on the quarter-deck.

He was once more alone with Mr. Whiffers, as the young man respectfully approached, they having both examined the new-comer in their horizon attentively with their glasses.

"Mr. Hurry-up!"

"Yes, sir."

"On your word of honor, have you recognized the vessel approaching?"

"I have, sir—on the instant."

"It is the Sea Scout?"

"It is."

"What is her available fighting force?"

"I shall not tell you."

"Humph! She'll evidently know ours before a great while."

"Very like, sir," with a smile. "She has the look of being in a rather inquiring mood."

"Yes, yes; perhaps so. Mr. Hurry-up, I should dislike exceedingly to order you and your fellow-unfortunates into irons."

"Captain Armadel, you could hardly dislike it more than we at being placed there."

"Have I your parole of honor to be strictly neutral in the contest that is about to ensue, sir?"

"You have, sir."

"You will answer for the neutrality of your companions, likewise?"

"I will, sir."

"That will do, Mr. Hurry-up. I honor you with my confidence."

Ben thanked him, and returned to his companions.

Captain Armadel, though something of a quarter-deck little coxcomb at inglorious ease, was every inch a sailor, with a lion's heart, in time of action.

"Mr. Whiffers," he said, quietly, but with the true battle-light in his eye, "run up our colors, and bear right in on the rascal without delay. We are ready to give or take hell with her as the case may be!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

BROADSIDE FIGHTING.

THE rival war-ships were by this time about four miles apart, with the trade-gale, freshening hourly from the northeast, rather in favor of the Britisher.

The Vixen had already beaten to quarters, and no sooner had she rounded in and run up her colors than the privateer suddenly rounded out, the Stars and Stripes streamed flauntingly from her gaff, and a thirty-two-pounder from her Long Tom, after a long, curving swoop, made a round hole through her adversary's maintopsail before plunging into the sea just over the starboard rail.

"Rafferty's own shot!" exultingly commented Barnacle Ben, in a low tone that was only overheard by Vanderspiegel. "Martin is sailing her capitally, too. Jupiter! let him only keep it up long range, and he's got a dead-sure thing. The only thirty-two on board here is the stern-gun, and she an iron gun, that can't hold a candle to our old Long Tom at far targeting."

"Ach!" muttered the Dutchman, in response; "put, gaptain, der Pritisher here hash dirty-doo cuns to der Scout's eighteen. I gounted dem."

"Thirty-two pop-guns—the best of 'em twenty-fours, and the rest eighteens!" contemptuously. "Besides, big and stanch as she is, she's a slower sailer than the Termagant was. I've studied her to some purpose since we've been aboard."

"Put dree hundert unt fifty mens, gaptain!"

"To the Scout's hundred and fifty—granted! But what does that count at even broadside fighting, if boarding is out of the question? However, we mustn't forget that Martin may have made some additions to the crew during our twenty-odd days' elimination out of her."

"Ach, yes, gaptain! der illumination, v'atfer dot may dignify, vill make un pig difference, no doubt."

Anak suddenly roused himself to point at the privateer, which had by this time again come about in order to decrease the intervening space, though with a wariness that was particularly pleasing to her exiled young commander at this juncture.

"Bow-gun—red-hot!" he whispered, with his inexhaustible grin. "Me see!"

"What did you see that escaped us?" demanded Ben.

"Hot shot—red-hot! One glisten, two pairs tongs—dat's all!"

Barnacle Ben hesitated. The Scout had not been possessed of the appliances necessary for heating shot, and he could not deem it probable that she had been able to add them to her equipment in the four weeks, or nearly so, that had intervened since his separation from her.

In the mean time, the Vixen had been replying with her own bow-chaser, while heading in with the hope of getting at closer quarters, but with no effect, seeing that the gun was but a twenty-four, with the dividing interval still nearer four than three miles.

But hardly were the last words out of the negro's mouth before the privateer's bow-chaser opened fire, the shot burying itself, with a crash, fairly in the sloop's port bow, the breach being almost instantly followed by smoke and flames.

No question as to Anak's shrewdness now. A detachment of tars was already hurrying forward with canvas water-pails, and there was not a face on view that did not grow anxious no less than stern.

At this instant Barnacle Ben caught Captain Armadel's eye.

The latter's face was fairly purple as he stamped his foot, and turned to his first officer.

"By heaven! that was a red-hot ball, Whiffers!" he exclaimed, with an oath.

"Not a doubt of it," the lieutenant dryly responded.

"And we haven't got a shot-furnace on board!"

"No, sir; it was, unfortunately, omitted from our equipment."

"What," with another oath, "can we do if the fellow refuses to come in, and can at the same time sail around at us at his caprice?"

"The wind may fail, which would give us a better show, sir."

"Yes; and may not—which is far more likely. By Jove! it is even freshening."

Captain Armadel controlled himself, seemingly by a great effort, and signaled Barnacle Ben to approach.

"You might, at least, have hinted to me, as my guest," he said, coldly, "that the Scout was capable of firing hot shot."

"Such a hint, sir," was the response, "would have been only a fair return for your hospitality—had I possessed the information requisite to affording it."

"What! you did not know?"

"Assuredly, not, sir! The shot was no less a surprise to me than to yourself. I am still puzzled as to how she may have been able to add the new feature to her armament."

"Well—I believe you," crustily. "That will do, Mr. Hurry-up."

But at this instant there was a second red-hot shot from the privateer—this time from the stern chaser, for she had already gone about with the rapidity that was one of her big sailing-points—and Ben had hardly turned on his heel before the bolt struck on the forecastle-deck.

There was more smoke, a spurt of flame, a panicky rush of tars from the spot, and then the forward magazine, filled with cartridges for the ship's small-arms, blew up with a terrific explosion.

Ben rushed forward, fearing that Anak and the Dutchman might be numbered with the victims.

Both had escaped, however, though the deck in their vicinity was strewed with dead or mutilated men to the number of a score or more, while the sloop's fire-brigade were on hand just in time to prevent the spread of the flames.

"It is horrible!" exclaimed Barnacle Ben under his breath, as he unhesitatingly hurried with his companions to assist with the wounded. "But then this ship is almost double her strength; so what better treatment can they expect?"

Then a third shot of the same sort buried itself in the mainmast, after knocking the hood of the companionway into jackstraws, and the edge of the poop-deck itself was on fire.

Captain Armadel raged like a caged tiger back and forth, while there was not an officer around him who was not troubled.

"By heaven!" he roared; "is it impossible for us to close in on her?"

"Not if she won't come half-way, sir," returned Mr. Whiffers, sadly. "We haven't the ghost of a show with her sailing qualities. We might try to board her, though the distance is still great."

"Do so! Out with the boats! By all the gods of war! anything is preferable to being thus pinked and scorched to death at long range."

The necessary orders were given, and, while the Vixen's boats were being lowered, an exceptionally lucky shot from her bow-gun caused the splinters to fly from the privateer's cutwater, which reheartened the former's crew, from which a rousing British cheer went up.

Then the boats, four in number and crammed with picked tars, quitted the sloop's side with another cheer, while the sloop herself crowded after them with every stitch that would draw in order to cover their advance.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"BIG SHIP A GOOD DOG, BUT LONG RANGE A BETTER."

"MR. HURRY-UP!"

"Yes, sir."

Captain Armadel had quitted the quarter-deck to slip forward to the young man's side, after seeing the boarding-gangs safely started.

"Who is chief gunner on board the Sea Scout?"

"Mr. Dennis Rafferty, sir."

Captain Armadel started back, with a look of consternation that he was unable to mask.

"Not—not," he exclaimed, hoarsely, "the Gunner Rafferty, formerly of the frigate Agamemnon, in our last brush with the Spaniards?"

"The same, I believe, sir," gravely. "At all events, he is an elderly man now, and had achieved a high reputation in your service prior to our Declaration of Independence."

"Good God! the best gunner in the whole English navy!"

This in a deeply despondent rather than a choleric tone, after which the troubled commander of the Vixen sloop-of-war slowly retraced his steps, without another word.

He had scarcely remounted the poop-deck before there was another cheer from his ship's crew.

Another lucky shot had sent the splinters leaping, this time from the Scout's starboard quarter, and all four boarding boats were well away, under both sail and oar, with the Vixen sheeting after them.

But the exultation was of the briefest duration.

A whole broadside from the Scout, which had gracefully rounded in to within three miles, fairly riddled the foremost boat, sinking her at once, and spilling her inmates in the water, injured and uninjured, dead and living, besides bringing down the Vixen's entire foretopmast, with all its raffle of cordage and canvas, littering the entire forecastle-deck, to say nothing of the bowsprit giving way under the dead weight of it all.

"Broadside for broadside!" roared Armadel. "Let her have it!"

But the return broadside was altogether ineffective, by reason of the sudden listing of the Vixen through the wreckage of the foretop spars landing chiefly on her port bow.

Then it became quite evident that her wily antagonist had come in to as close quarters as she would venture at the present stage of the game.

She was already bowing away at a pace that could laugh at both oars and sails; and now another hot shot from her Long Tom took the Vixen fairly amidships, again necessitating the utmost exertion with the fire-buckets as the smoke and flame sprung upon the heels of the fiery shock; while yet another knocked the sloop's cutter—the largest of the boats, with the second lieutenant in command—to pieces, with a loss of fully half her fighting crew in killed and wounded, with the rest running their chances against the sharks before they could be picked up.

Captain Armadel had grown very pale, and, though his demeanor was now dignified and composed, it was evident that his mental anguish was extreme.

"Signal the remaining boats to return, Mr. Whiffers," heat last ordered. "There is no need of the men going to certain death, nor is there any possibility of their overhauling that water-devil in this wind. Our only hope is to finally seduce the privateer under our broadside."

The lieutenant transmitted the order, and then said:

"There is but one way to do that that I can think of, sir; and that might be—ur—considered somewhat irregular in naval warfare, you know."

"What is it?"

"To propose a parley, or negotiation, for the return of this young skipper to his ship."

"Well?"

"And during the parley get the privateer so close to us that we can, suddenly and without warning, pour broadsides into her, while also pouring our superior numbers over her rail."

Armadel started.

"And yet why not?" he said, half to himself. "Treachery, it is true; but then there is no honor in fighting with a pirate; and is an unpapered privateer any better than a pirate according to the laws of civilized warfare? However, this sort of work can't go on much longer, at any rate, without our going to the bottom, or surrendering to a craft not much more than half our size. Humiliating thought! Ahem! Mr. Whiffers."

"Yes, sir."

"Where is Mr. Hurry-up?"

"I see him still forward, sir."

"Signal him to come here, if you please. I'll sound him gradually on the subject, and then make the proposition to him."

But, beyond the preliminaries, that proposition was destined never to be made.

"Come here, if you please, Mr. Hurry-up," said Captain Armadel, with a rather weak show of affability as Barnacle Ben once more approached. "What is your opinion of this fight thus far?"

"You request my frank opinion, Captain Armadel?"

"I do, indeed, sir."

"It is this, then: Big Ship's a Good Dog, but Long Range is a Better. That is an old-time proverb slightly altered to the present occasion, sir."

"Humph! Well now look here, Mr. Hurry-up—"

"Captain Harrup, sir, of the Sea Scout privateer, if you please!"

"Ahem! correction accepted, sir, under the circumstances."

"Thank you, Captain Armadel."

"Now then, Captain Harrup, there is a certain proposition I intend to make to you and it is this: You see—"

There was a crashing broadside from the privateer.

Lieutenant Whiffers's head was carried clean off his shoulders, and he not three paces distant, the head itself striking the man at the wheel off his pins, while the spouting blood from the falling body plentifully sprinkled the unfortunate post-captain from head to foot, the fatal cannon-ball expended itself in the port after-chains where it demolished the gig-boat.

Simultaneously every other shot told, two of them entering at the water-line, and causing the ship to list to starboard so far as to render that broadside useless for the time being, while a third completed the weakening of the mainmast to that degree that it instantly went by the board, likewise to starboard, so that for the time being at least the vessel was practically a wreck.

Moreover, a dozen men were killed or disabled by the tumble, both Captain Armadel and Barnacle Ben escaping by the merest chance.

Five minutes later, when something like order and discipline had been wrested out of the confusion, the commander of the Vixen stood once again at the young man's side.

If he had been pale before, he was ghastly now, though with his sailor's courage screwed up to the sticking-point.

"Ah, Captain Harrup," he began, with a significant "Ahem!" which was rather pitiable, "in reference to that proposition I was about to make to you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Let it pass, if you please. I have concluded to hold it—ah!—in abeyance, sir."

The young man bowed gravely.

The Scout was now within rifle-shot, pouring broadside after broadside into the defenseless slope of the careening Vixen's decks, and she not able as yet to reply with a single gun, besides being on fire in three places.

Then out of the smoke and flash and roar came the shout, in Miles Hobby's voice, through a trumpet:

"Have you struck?"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A MASTER-PRIZE.

FOR an instant there was, comparatively, a dead silence, as though the cannonade itself, like a sentient force, had paused to admit of a reply to the momentous question.

Captain Armadel, with nothing but panic and slaughter around him, was leaning against the port poop-railing, with his hands momentarily before his face.

An agonizing question for a brave, sensitive spirit, also the commandant of an originally superior force, and yet one that must be answered!

When the lion-hearted commander's face was uncovered, however, it was filled with nothing but a tremendous resolve, and the answer would probably have been such a negative as would have sealed his own fate and the remainder of his unfortunate crew.

But at that instant Barnacle Ben ran up, and seized his hand.

"It is hard, but it is imperative upon you in the interests of your crew," he exclaimed, a world of kindness and sympathy in his youthful face. "Render up your ship, sir! Look around you. Your vessel practically a wreck, your men decimated or disheartened, your entire guns on the only available side useless, and—Look there!"

He pointed to the second lieutenant, just prostrated a moment before, the life-blood slowly welling from a musket-shot wound in the side.

"Have you struck?" again rung out from the privateer, with something horribly ominous and metallic in the intonation. "Hurry up with your answer, if you don't want to be riddled from stern-post to cutwater!"

Captain Armadel made an agonized gesture. "As you will, my friend," he at last managed to say, in heart-breaking tones. "I leave it in your hands!"

And, hurrying further aft, he bowed his face upon his hands, with which he clutched the poop-rail, his body shaken by the convulsive but voiceless sobs of a brave man in his humiliation and despair.

"The Vixen strikes her flag!" yelled the youth through his hollowed hands. "It is Captain Harrup of the Sea Scout that tells you so!"

And the next minute he had lowered the British ensign with his own hands.

Half an hour later, the formal surrender at Captain Armadel's hands was completed, and the adventurers of the Sea Scout were in possession of a greater and richer prize than even the Termagant had been.

The Vixen was a larger and better ship in every respect—though of the same class—mounting a heavier armament and having a more numerous crew; and, if the vessel had been more damaged, thus necessitating a larger amount of temporary repairs, her capture had been effected with less loss of life; there being a count of 110 uninjured prisoners.

"How is it you are in command, Miles?" had been Barnacle Ben's first question, after a few hasty explanations, on his boarding his own ship. "I thought I recognized Martin's style in the first hours of your maneuvering."

For answer Hobby led him to where the lifeless remains of the first mate lay under a white sheet, and decently composed, in the gun-room.

"It happened in the first splintering we got from the Britisher's bow-gun," said Miles, briefly. "A sad mischance, for he was our only man killed, though we have a dozen or more wounded, none of them disablingly, according to Surgeon Luray's report. I imitated his cautious tactics to the best of my lights, as being the noblest immediate compliment I could pay to his brave memory; and only closed in at last when I saw that I had careened the sloop-of-war so far as to render her broadside useless."

"You did nobly. Poor old Silas!" and Ben feelingly touched the cold forehead; "he was a friend of my father's before being mine, and no truer patriot or better sailor ever went to his last account. But, perhaps fortunately, he has no wife, child, nor other near relative that I know of to mourn him—only the friends to whom he was so honest and true." He covered up the dead face again. "Where is Tom Simmons?"

"Nursing a wounded hand. He will be here presently. You can judge how your voice in answer to my surrender-summons astounded and electrified the whole ship."

"Ah; perhaps naturally enough. And Boatswain Jack Blackwell, and old Uncle Joe Bumper?"

"Boatswain all right, but I am sorry to say that Mr. Bumper was fast getting very drunk in the ward-room cuddy when I last saw him. A round shot had knocked his wooden leg into small bits, and you would have thought it his remaining real leg from the way he was crooning over it."

"That little cutter you have in convoy? A prize?"

"Yes; taken several days ago, with three pirates aboard—deserters from the Azrael's ship's-company."

"The deuce! A windfall that, eh?"

"We have been hoping to prove it such. At all events, the rascals have given us some valuable points already as to Death's cruising-grounds. We were hoping to get a glimpse of the devil's craft when we sighted the Vixen."

"That's queer. Captain Armadel was also hot in the corsair's chase, and, next to the capture of our bold privateer here, I think the prospective wiping out of the pirate was the apple of his mind's eye."

"Well, we shall probably take the second job out of his hand, as we have taken the first. But these are things that we must discuss when more at our leisure."

One man killed, and a dozen or more wounded, none of them disablingly! Such the record of Sea Scout, in strange, all but incredible contrast with that of the powerful Vixen, whom she had overpowered, with this appalling count: Eighty killed, one hundred and sixty wounded or drowned, one hundred and ten prisoners, uninjured, to say nothing of the wounded who might recover, to be added to the latter score.

Sail was made for Martinique, where the work of repairs on both war-ships was expedited; at the finishing of which the Vixen was dispatched for France, together with all the prisoners, under charge of a competent prize-crew.

Then the cruise of the Sea Scout in search of the pirate Azrael was resumed, with Barnacle Ben once more the monarch of his own quarter-deck; it now being April, with more equable weather for the tropical seas among whose Eden isles her course must still be laid.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ON THE PIRATE'S TRACK.

IMPATIENT to make an end of his cruise, that he might obtain his letter-of-marque, already so

long delayed, and without which authorization he knew himself to be but a few shades better than a pirate in the estimation of the law of nations at that period, Captain Ben resolved to bend every nerve and energy to the release of his sweetheart and sister as the now sole remaining serious task between him and that longed-for end.

The deserters from the Azrael had, indeed, furnished some information as to their whilom chieftain's movements and intentions, but only such as had to be accepted with many grains of allowance in consideration of the source from which it emanated, so that this fresh quest at its outset was almost as vague and blind as the one that had preceded it.

But several incidents soon occurred which tended to throw a more satisfactory light on the great object in view.

In the first place, three days out from Martinique, he made a prize of a fine English brig, deep with nuts, fruits and dye-stuffs from Kingston for Liverpool, whose captain imparted some valuable information with regard to Captain Scudder, in return for certain courtesies shown to him and his men by his youthful captor.

It came about in this way:

"I had been assured that the captain of the Sea Scout was one of nature's noblemen," said the skipper of the captured brig at last, "and now I know it of my own experience. Captain Scudder, formerly of our Royal Navy, assured me of it in the first instance."

"Thanks!" Ben had replied. "But Captain Scudder, eh? Didn't he arrive in Jamaica in rather bad shape, though?"

"Yes; he had met with misfortunes, the nature of which are doubtless familiar to you, captain."

"Certainly they are."

"Well, his luck changed wonderfully directly after his arrival there."

"In what way?"

"A distant relative on his mother's side had died a few days previously. He had been one of the richest sugar-growers and slave-owners on the island; and it seems that Scudder in his boyhood had impressed the old gentleman very favorably during one of the latter's rare visits to his English kinsfolk many years previously. It must have been an exceptionally abiding impression, as the forgetful world goes. At all events, he had willed the captain his entire estate unreservedly—a princely fortune!"

"You surprise me; but I am glad of it for Scudder's sake."

"So was every one who had known him truly, for he was a general favorite, I believe; and it was a strange coincidence, his arriving there in such bad straits, and yet just in time to take possession."

"Indeed, it was; but I suppose that caused him to give up all further intentions as to rescuing the captive young ladies, with whose sad case you must be familiar."

"Yes; Captain Scudder made their story well known upon his first arrival, doubtless in the hope of interesting other ship-masters who might touch there. But, on the contrary, he is more earnest in his individual efforts in the young ladies' behalf than ever before."

"That is good news."

"There is still better. Before I quitted Jamaica Captain Scudder had bought a fine schooner, manned, equipped and armed her, and had already sailed away in quest of Captain Death's Azrael."

"What! he had then learned of the young ladies having become the pirate's prisoners?"

"Yes; the news of it had in some way reached the authorities at Kingston."

"And the villain Manners?" Barnacle Ben's brow blackened as he pronounced the loathed name. "Of course you must have heard him mentioned in connection with the case?"

"Yes; but there was no report, that I ever heard of, as to what had become of that scoundrel. It was the general impression that he had been killed by the pirates."

Then, a couple of days later, when in a dead calm, the lookout reported a small boat, or raft, far to the southwest, with something moving upon it that might be a man or some animal.

A boat was sent away to investigate, and on closer examination a pitiable tragedy of the sea was revealed.

The object proved to be a small life-raft, of the most miserable construction, bearing a man and a dog, both apparently in the last stages of extreme suffering, and surrounded by shoals of sharks more or less impatiently waiting to make meal of them.

On being taken into the boat, and being temporarily relieved, the man gave a hoarse, grateful cry, and then fell into a faint, while the dog—a huge-headed, coarse-haired, mongrel brute of great size—revived much more readily upon having its immediate wants relieved, in the form of ship's-bread soaked in brandy and water, after which it fell to whining piteously beside its unconscious master, and occasionally licking his face and hands.

The man, also, on having his head plentifully bathed with sea-water, presently recovered his senses and sat up.

He was a villainous-looking, coppery-hued fellow, gaunt and haggard to a degree, and evidently of a very powerful physique when at his best.

He made some gestures expressive of his gratitude, and then muttered foreign words that none of the boat's crew could understand.

On reaching the privateer, however, he was found to be a Malay, with a smattering of Spanish, Portuguese and French, but none of English.

This discovery was made by Uncle Joe Bumper, who was more or less conversant with several lingoos other than his own, and whose vast seafaring experience had brought him in contact with the peoples and customs of many climes.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A SEA-WAIF.

BUT the most important thing in connection with this ocean-waif was a piece of news that was unexpectedly elicited from him.

This was that the villain Manners was now not only alive and well, but a member of the Azrael's ship's company, in the capacity of the master-pirate's most trusted confidant.

The rescued man—Allorma, as he called himself—had himself been one of the pirate crew, and the conversation with Captain Ben, with Uncle Joe as interpreter, which finally evolved this information, took place in the cabin saloon of the privateer, as soon as the fellow was sufficiently recuperated to undergo the examination.

"Who are you?" was Barnacle Ben's first question.

"I am Allorma."

"What are you?"

"A native of Borneo—a Malay."

"But how came you adrift?"

"I was sent adrift by my captain—may he roast in hell for a million years, together with the young thief who prompted my punishment!"

"What was your ship?"

Here there was a string of furious gibberish, which Interpreter Bumper professed himself unable to make anything out of.

"Tell him," suggested Ben, "that he must answer promptly, or it will be the worse for him."

Here followed a wrangle between witness and interpreter, as they would say in a court report, that was altogether unintelligible.

"He says," and Bumper brightened up at last, "that he must have a bottle of brandy, or his memory will not stand by him."

"I don't believe he says that," cried Captain Ben, bluntly, while both Hobby and Simmons, who were present at the interview, burst into a laugh. "The man has already had all the grog he seemed to care for."

"But not pure brandy, Nephew Ben," replied the boatswain's mate, with imperturbable gravity. "And that is what he demands as a brain-clearer."

"Perhaps it is yours that is muddled, Captain Joe."

"Clear as crystal, my boy!"

"Then maybe you fail to interpret him correctly."

The man here, after looking puzzled, broke out into impatient words.

"You see that?" cried Bumper, triumphantly. "The very mention of the word 'brandy' has set him off on a kind of a jump."

"When he doesn't understand English? Non-sense!"

Mr. Bumper scratched his head, while there was another laugh as the Malay again said something unintelligible.

"Dash my toplights, if he isn't going to have the horrors!" cried Uncle Joe. "Perhaps brandy is one word in Malay and English."

"Ah, indeed! Well, we'll give him a chance." And Vanderspiegel, who had joyously returned to his steward's duties, was ordered to produce a bottle of brandy and a glass.

Uncle Joe at once poured out a stiff snip of the liquor, and cautiously tendered it to the waif.

But, when the latter was about to seize it, with a few words, which were probably those of thanks, the old fellow dignifiedly motioned him back, and then drained the contents himself.

"The impudence of these foreign cusses!" indignantly cried Bumper, wiping his lips with the back of his hand. "It passes belief."

"What is the matter now?"

"Why, he insisted on my repeating a verse of the Koran before swallowing the ball to his health. He must be one of them God-forsaken Mohammedans, you see."

"Ah, indeed! Try him again."

"No use, sir! Besides, he probably wouldn't appreciate such prime stuff as this, even if it were plenty enough to waste upon him." And the old fellow forthwith downed another nip, after once more scornfully waving back the other's attempt to appropriate it.

But just here the Malay uttered a scream of rage, and seizing Uncle Joe by the throat, began to shake him till his teeth rattled.

"Take him off, or give me a fire-lock!" gasped

Bumper, growing black in the face. "Mebbe he's going to run amuck."

Captain Ben, while there was another roar of laughter, released him from his predicament, and then poured out a draught of the liquor for the Malay, who drank it off with many signs of gratitude.

"Van, take away that bottle," ordered Ben, peremptorily. "Now, Uncle Joe, you will continue your interpreting ship-shape, or I'll see to it that your grog shall be docked for a month."

Bumper's eyes followed the disappearing bottle regretfully, and then he bowed to the inevitable.

"He says he was one of Captain Death's pirate crew," he continued, after exchanging some words with the Malay, whose good humor seemed to have been wholly restored.

"Oh, he does, eh?" cried Ben, angrily. "Why couldn't he say that at the outset?"

"He was afraid you might yard-arm him for the confession, sir—so he says."

"Uncle Joe, I believe you lie."

"Oh, Captain Ben! An' me your own blood relation, too!"

"No, more trifling, I tell you! Why did the pirate skipper set him adrift?"

"For quarreling with a young man newly taken into the skipper's confidence, he says, and all on account of the young ladies on board the Azrael."

"What young man was that?"

"A chap who had formerly been the young ladies escort, he says, and then been marooned by Captain Death."

"What!"

"True as you live, my boy!" continued Bumper, after an animated colloquy with the Malay. "It's that hound Manners himself that's back in the schooner, and in Captain Death's best graces, into the bargain."

"Give us the particulars!" cried Barnacle Ben. "This is news, indeed!"

The Malay's story, as gradually elicited from him through Uncle Joe's clumsy instrumentality, was this:

The island to which Manners had succeeded in making his escape, after his foul desertion of his benefactors upon the sand-bank, was a small and uninhabited, but well-wooded and well-watered islet, immemorially an occasional resort of buccaneers and pirates for the purpose of securing water and fuel, cocoanuts and bananas being also in abundance.

After Manners had been on the island for about a week, the Azrael had suddenly appeared in the offing, and he had concealed himself in a thicket when a boat was seen putting off from her.

In addition to the crew, with water-casks, in the boat, there were also Captain Death and the two young ladies; the concealed Manners at once realizing the situation, which was to the effect that the pirate skipper was giving his fair captives an airing at the same time that the water-casks were being replenished.

There seemed to be a conspiracy on the part of the boat's crew, perhaps with the connivance of others left on board the schooner, to take advantage of this occasion to kill their commander, probably for the purpose of securing possession of the young women.

Allorma, according to his own confession, was one of the conspirators in the boat, and he also had with him his dog, which he had obtained at one of the Windward Islands just before joining the pirate's fortunes.

At all events, soon after the landing had been effected, and while the young women were gathering wildflowers in a wood under the skipper's escort, the latter had been suddenly and murderously assaulted by the boat's crew, six in number, armed with knives and bludgeons.

Notwithstanding that the pirate captain had defended himself with address and bravery, he would doubtless have been overpowered, but for Manners, who, seeing his opportunity, rushed, cudgel in hand, to his assistance, and with such effect that all the assailants were killed, with the single exception of the Malay, who was made a prisoner after being prostrated by a heavy blow.

Both Death and Manners had received serious wounds. But a boat was signaled for, and they had returned with the young women to the schooner, where subsequently several of the pirates who were found to have been implicated in the conspiracy were thrown to the sharks.

Manners had earned the chieftain's gratitude, and it was at his suggestion that the Malay, for his share in the plot, had been set adrift with his dog upon the miserable raft from which the privateer had so opportunely rescued him.

Such was the sea-waif's extraordinary disclosure.

CHAPTER XL. THE MALAY AND HIS DOG.

It was further elicited from the Malay that the young women were being very respectfully treated by the pirate captain.

He called them his children, had given up nearly his entire cabin to their exclusive accommodation, and the slightest disrespect shown to either of them was punishable with death.

Indeed, according to Allorma, there was but one instance, apart from their restraint on board the schooner, in which Captain Death had been known to oppose their wishes.

That was after the island incident just related, and with regard to Manners himself.

Both young women had strenuously opposed the taking of the young man on board, contending that it was an act for which nothing but treachery would ever be given in payment, but the sense of gratitude was strong with Death, and in this one instance he had persisted in opposing them.

He had not only incorporated the ex-marooned lieutenant with his ship's company, but shortly afterward had even made him his first mate, to fill a berth made vacant by the recent death of its occupant, instead of promoting his second mate to the position, and Manners had at once begun to exert a strong personal influence over him.

This had caused much secret satisfaction among the Azrael's crew of a hundred men, no less than with the young women themselves.

From that moment they had held themselves more aloof from their chief captor than ever, while they would not recognize Manners himself by so much as a look.

This was all very gratifying to Barnacle Ben, so far as his sweetheart and sister were concerned, though there were not wanting many elements of inconsistency in the story.

"Why should Captain Death treat his fair captives with such courtesy and respect?" he demanded of Allorma, through Uncle Joe's interpretation. "It does not seem plausible."

"It is true," was the terse reply.

"But is he not a blood-thirsty villain of the deepest dye?"

"On the high seas, and with ships and men, yes, captain, he has not his equal in the throat-slitting line. But with women, no; Captain Death is never cruel to them."

"But I have heard different."

"That he was cruel to them, señor?"

"Not that, but that he is equally a desperado with them. I have heard that it is his boast that he has a wife or two on nearly every free-booter's island in the Spanish Main."

"Señor, I say nothing as to that; we all have our eccentricities, for that matter and there is something else."

"What is it?"

"I must tell you a little story. Captain Death had two beautiful daughters. One was dark, the other fair, and had they lived they would have been about the ages of the young women on board the Azrael, and perhaps not unlike them in appearance."

"Ah!"

"But they did not live, these fair creatures that were the apple of Bully Captain Death's eye, señor."

"What became of them?"

"They died of yellow-fever in Porto Rico a year ago."

"Oho!"

"Yes, señor. It was in a convent, whither they had retired to bury themselves from the world and do penance ceaselessly for their father's sins."

"Ah, I begin to understand."

"Just so, señor. Directly following upon their death our captain was a fiend. Two priests whom he captured out of a Spaniard he caused to be tortured with hot irons before tossing them to the sharks. He held the Church responsible for the sweet young things' taking off. I am sure he would cheerfully have murdered every priest therein, including the Pope and all his bishops. *Bueno!* along came these two fair captives, the one dark, the other fair. Nothing is too good for them, save only they must not quit the ship. He is a father again, so to speak. Do you begin to understand, captain?"

All this through Bumper's interpretation, as a matter of course.

"Yes," replied Barnacle Ben, and the interview terminated.

After that, Allorma, the Malay, and his huge dog, which he called Bug, were picturesque features on board the privateer.

However, Barnacle Ben viewed him with a suspicion that was soon shared by many others.

"There's something wrong about that chap," said Miles Hobby, to the young skipper, a day or two later on, when the privateer was heading northward under a fine breeze, without having sighted a single sail since the calm. "The boatswain surprised him with an off-hand question this morning, and he answered it aptly enough, and in pretty fair English, at that."

Barnacle Ben knitted his brows.

"The fellow must be narrowly watched," he said.

"That is already being done, depend upon it, sir."

This was in the cabin saloon, after breakfast; and at this juncture Van, the fat steward, asked:

"Off you please, gaptain, might I myself say somedings all der dimes?"

"For this time, at all events, Van," was the response.

"Dot yeller veller ish unt von Pilly pe

tammtdt loafer!" then cried the steward, with much energy of manner.

Hobby burst into a laugh, while Ben asked Van for an explanation.

"Dot veller ish uncrateful ash so many radle-snakes unt cround-zharks!" continued Vanderspiegel, vehemently. "Unt dat schnapps-kuzzling, wooden-leg olt man, olt Choe Bumper, isn't any petter all der dimes!"

"But why, Van?" cried Ben, impatiently. "What is all this about?"

"Vell, I oferhears dem dalking mit demsellufs. It vas lasd nide py der mainmast, v'en dey doughht demsellufs all alone mit noppoddis. 'V'ot you dinks, olt mans?' says der yeller veller. 'If I vas gaptain off dis vine ship, you should haff un pottle off pranty dree dimes a tay, mit un nide-gap cff olt Hollant chin effery nide for do vipe der gob-vebs owd your prains unt to make you shleep like sixty. How vos dot vor high?"

"You are sure you overheard this?" said Ben sternly, while Hobby also grew grave.

"Shoost zo zhure ash I standt here, gaptain."

"And what reply did Mr. Bumper make to this?"

"I couldn't hear dot; it vos doo dark. Put I could hear him vag his olt het unt shmac'h his lips, zhust as if he had dem glued to der bung-hole off a parrel off visky, mit no von to see how many callons he kuzzled at der first shwig."

"That will do, then. I can't for the life of me imagine how the dreadful predicament from which we rescued him could be part and parcel of a ruse in the pirate captain's interests."

"Neither can I," observed Miles. "The man's sufferings were too evident to be counterfeit. Perhaps he is merely a natural-born mischief-maker. But he shall be watched all the more closely for the doubt."

That night, soon after eight bells, there was a suspicious incident.

There was a great uproar, mingled with the furious barking of a dog in the forecastle.

Then Anak made his appearance at the door of the cook-house, gripping the Malay by the throat with one hand, and the Malay's big dog with the other.

Captain Ben chanced to be on the quarter-deck with Simmons at the time, and they both ran forward.

"What is the meaning of this?" cried the former, the crowd of sailors that had collected giving way to let him pass. "What is it, Anak?"

"Yaller man, big dog. Much sly talk!" guffawed the negro. "No good! poison in soup!"

As he spoke he relinquished his grasp on both man and dog, after a parting shake with his immense strength, which seemed to fairly rattle the bones inside their respective skins.

CHAPTER XLI.

AHOY!

THUS released, both man and dog skulked suddenly under the fore-hatch rail, where they remained in sinister silence, the former almost as suggestive of low animal cunning and secrecy as the other.

"Poison in the soup!" thundered Barnacle Ben. "Speak, Anak! do you mean to say you have detected this man in an attempt to poison the men's food?"

It turned out, however, that Anak had only used the startling words in a figurative sense.

Allorma, with his inevitable dog at his heels, had skulked into the galley, and, finding the negro alone, had ventured to sound him as to the feasibility of arranging a conspiracy for the ultimate seizure of the ship, with the intention of turning her into a pirate, with the Malay himself as commander.

It was this species of poison, striving for an introduction into the soup of his understanding, so to speak, that the loyal black had trotted at its first suggestion by summarily taking both man and dog in custody after the manner set forth.

"Man no good; dog no better!" grunted the negro, after making this explanation. "Man two-foot debbil; dog four-foot debbil. Chuck 'em to sharks. Bet hundred dollar sharks won't bite 'em—debbil wouldn't let 'em. Ugh!"

"What have you to say to this charge?" Ben demanded of the Malay. "Speak out, curse you! for we know you can understand English on occasion."

"I can't help bein' a pirate, señor," growled Allorma, with a frank scowl. "But I'd as lief be one under your command as any one else's. As to taking the ship, it was only a joke. But it's only as a pirate that you can catch a pirate; and the Azrael is fairly ballasted with gold and silver bars and ingots, to say nothing of jewels and other swag. I know that Bully Death can't have had a chance to hide 'em away on shore yet awhile."

"You're frank enough in your villainy, any way!" cried Captain Ben, not a little astonished by this unexpected confession.

"Not altogether above board, young man!" suddenly interposed Old Bumper. "His plot for taking the ship wasn't a joke, anyway, for he tried to make a sim'lar proposition to me last night, and I let on not to mind him, though in-

tending to report the thing as it might develop."

Ben was secretly rejoiced at this volunteered statement, since it effectually let his eccentric old uncle out of the suspicion which Vander spiegel's announcement had naturally engendered concerning him.

He forthwith ordered Allorma into irons as being the readiest mode of keeping him safe for the time being.

While this order was being carried out several of the seamen, at Bumper's suggestion, grabbed the dog, Bug, with the avowed intention of testing Anak's declaration with regard to the sharks in regard to the animal at least.

This threw the Malay into a violent frenzy. "You won't dare to do it!" he yelled, fighting desperately with his captors in spite of the heavy irons that had been clapped upon his wrists and ankles. "Cowards! that is my dog, and he is a faithful brute—a true buccaneer. He will lick the hand that loves him or drag down an island bull by the nose at command. Villains! if you harm Bug, I will kill you one by one—I will tear you piecemeal before I die!"

But a chorus of derisive laughs was the sole response vouchsafed him, and then, before Ben could think of interposing his command to the contrary, the animal was hurled over the rail into the sea.

And now ensued a remarkable scene.

Hundreds of sharks were disporting themselves in the moon-lighted and phosphorescently-sparkling water alongside; but, whether from the fact of their being already gorged to repletion (and whoever heard of an unhungry shark?) with offal that had been thrown over, or from some other cause, they paid no heed whatever to the struggling canine, which swam after the vessel, whining almost humanely to be taken on board again.

"What I tell yer?" shouted Anak, while many of the others were stricken with superstitious fear. "Debbil in dat dog, shuah!"

"He deserves to be saved, anyway, and saved he shall be!" cried the young commander. "Noose a line there, some of you, and be lively! The dog sha'n't suffer for the master."

This was done, and the dog dragged back to the deck uninjured.

"Captain Harrup," called out the Malay, with much impressiveness, when being dragged away to confinement, with the dripping brute at his heels, "you've done me a good turn to-night, which may serve you well at some future day. A Malay never forgets a service, and never forgets a wrong."

"Ahoy!" was at this juncture sung out from the lookout aloft. "Ship's lantern in sight!"

"Whereaway?" called back Barnacle Ben, not sorry to have the disagreeable incident at an end.

"Two points off weather bow, sir, five miles away."

The young commander returned to the poop-deck, and the privateer's course was slightly altered accordingly.

Half an hour later, the lantern could be distinguished quite plainly from the deck, appearing like a restless star on the sea-line.

It grew perceptibly, showing that the Scout was steadily overhauling the vessel bearing the light; and finally her outlines were easily distinguishable against the star-studded blue-black of the tropic horizon.

Then there was a surprise.

There was a flash, the lantern's light was dimmed by a lurid flare, and the original restless gleam had blossomed and enlarged into a ship on fire.

"Fill away with all we can carry, Simpson!" exclaimed the young commander. "We may be in time to save life."

The Scout now had the wind on her starboard quarter, and, under the additional sail that was crowded upon her, she was bowling along at a spanking rate.

"Appears to me, sir," suggested the now second mate (Jack Blackwell having been promoted to his former berth), when the burning ship was at last no more than two miles away, "that there's a sail disappearing t'other side of her."

"It looks like it," replied Ben, after bringing his night-glass to bear. "If Miles Hobby isn't asleep, suppose you ask him to step up? His are the best night-eyes aboard, with perhaps the exception of Anak's."

Hobby came up in a hurry.

"It's a schooner!" he announced, after a brief but critical observation. "She's at least five miles beyond the burning ship, and putting off for all she is worth."

A schooner! There was only one schooner (a species of craft not so common in those days as now) in the Spanish Main of which the privateer's people took much account, and that was the phantom-like Azrael.

"Fetch up the Malay!" said Captain Ben, after a pause.

Allorma, still in irons, was summoned to the quarter-deck, given a telescope, and told to make an observation.

He sullenly complied, Bug crouching at his

feet, and two armed sailors keeping watch of her.

"Is it the Azrael?" demanded Ben.

"Nothing else, señor," and Allorma handed back the glass. "All's plain enough at a half-glance."

"What is plain enough?"

"The 'situation,' as you English-speakers might call it," half contemptuously.

"What do you make of it?"

"Why, Bully Death has gutted and fired that ship yonder, and then, sighting us, has filled away, as a matter of course. You don't suppose he would be such a fool as to let this big ship get him within gunshot, do you?"

Ben signed the sailors to keep the man still under watch where they were, and then ordered out a boat to inspect the fast consuming wreck at close quarters.

The boat promptly got away, under Jack Blackwell's command.

In the mean time, the privateer took in her royals, and slowly rounded the wreck, now not more than a mile away, and presenting a magnificent appearance.

Before the boat returned to the privateer, there was a tremendous explosion, and the blazing spectacle was extinguished with a terrific roar.

"What did you make out?" demanded Ben of Blackwell on his return.

"That there were plenty of dead men on her deck," was the reply. "The air was heavy with burning flesh."

"Did she seem to have been stripped, as far as you could make out?"

"Yes, sir; and there was also a smell of burning liquor, as if a cask or two might have been broached to make sure of the fire taking hold."

CHAPTER XLII.

THE PIRATE'S "DOUBLE."

THIS report was deemed a sufficient corroboration of Allorma's words.

After ordering every stitch to be crowded on for sheeting away in the pirate's track, Barnacle Ben turned to the Malay.

"You can be a free man," said he, "if you give your promise to behave yourself."

"I'll do nothing out of the way, señor," replied the man, seemingly with some gratitude.

Ben ordered his irons to be struck off, and then as the fellow was skulking forward, with his ugly cur at his heels, he said, warningly, in a low voice:

"You'll be watched closely, nevertheless, Allorma, and I'd advise you not to have much to say to anybody. The men haven't the best will toward you already."

But the chase of the schooner was doomed to disappointment at its outset.

Before midnight there sprung up a black squall that darkened the heavens and set the big waves to leaping at a great rate, necessitating an instant shortening of sail.

The squall blew itself out in less than four hours, but when it was over all traces of the schooner had been swallowed up as completely as if they had never existed, and morning broke over a slowly subsiding sea, with the Sea Scout the sole occupant of her horizon's scope.

However, shortly before noon another sail, evidently that of the same schooner, was sighted in the northwest.

It seemed odd that the Azrael could have made the grand curve necessary to reach that diverse quarter; but, just the same, the privateer was at once started in pursuit, and it, moreover, soon became apparent that this time, at least, she was fast outsailing her fugitive.

"I can't quite understand it," commented Miles Hobby, when the pursuit had lasted three hours, with the schooner's outlines at last fairly outlined against the sky.

"Neither can I," said the young commander. "However, she must have lost something in the squall, which would account for her slower sailing now."

The Malay was again sent for.

A look, first of astonishment, then of superstitious dread, came into his face.

"It isn't the Azrael!" he exclaimed.

"Not the Azrael?" echoed Ben.

"No, señor; unless—or—"

"Unless what?"

"It may be her double, señor."

"Don't venture to trifle with me!" cried the young commander, angrily.

"I am not trifling, sir."

"Whoever heard of a schooner or craft of any sort, having a double—a ghost?"

"Not I, for one, señor. But that isn't the pirate's own self."

"Doesn't it resemble her?"

"The exact image."

"Then why mayn't it be she?"

"She's in the wrong quarter, for one thing."

"Only three or four points' difference."

"Can you account for that much?"

"No."

"I should say not! But wait; how does she keep with you?"

"Poorly enough; we are overhauling her hand over hand."

Allorma clasped his hands, the trouble deepening in his dusky face.

"I knew it!" and then he repeated: "Her double! her double!"

"What do you mean, curse you!"

"Just what I say, señor." Here Bug, the dog, crouched lower at his feet, and began howling most dismally, as if baying a phantom moon.

"There; even Bug knows it."

"The devil seize you both, man and dog! I warn you not to trifle."

"By Mahomet's beard, Señor Capitano, I swear to you I am not trifling!"

The man's manner was certainly earnest enough, if it had never been so before.

"Would you tell me that a ship can have a ghost—a haunter?"

"I only know that the Azrael has one."

"How do you know it?"

"Because I have seen this one before—every one on board of her has seen it."

"When was this?"

"Only a few days before Bully Captain Death sent me adrift."

Barnacle turned to his three mates, all of whom were auditors to this strange conversation.

"Better keep this nonsense from the men," he said in a low voice.

They understood him, and nodded. Then, at a sign from Ben, Blackwell even took the wheel, and sent the man at it forward, lest he might be corrupted by the uncanny talk in the air.

Allorma had started out of his gloom, and was fixing his eyes upon the schooner in a singularly wild, alert way.

"Will some one please lend me a telescope?" he asked, after muttering something in his own tongue.

A glass was promptly handed him.

"It is as I feared!" he exclaimed, with fresh agitation. "Oyez, Señor Capitano!" returning the glass; "look for yourself."

"Whereaway?" demanded Barnacle Ben, while both Hobby and Simmons got their telescopes in readiness.

"Straight away, on a line with the double, and far beyond."

The observation was made.

"By Jupiter, it is true!" exclaimed Ben, between his teeth. "There's no denying one's own eyes, anyway."

The two others nodded, and looked more serious than ever.

There, far away, beyond and on a direct line with the first, or nearest, was a second schooner, the most perfect image in miniature prototype, as if painted against the glimmering brightness of sea and sky at meeting.

At last Ben burst into a puzzled laugh.

"But if one's the phantom," he cried, "why not the further one?"

But the Malay shook his head mysteriously, while the dog again set up its unearthly wail.

"Not possible," he said.

"But why not?" angrily.

"Did we even hold our own with the real Azrael last night?" queried Allorma. "Not so. But are we not overhauling this devil's counterpart of her now?"

"Granted."

"Bueno! Therefore this one is but a double, luring you on to destruction."

"Oho! you figure it out that way? Sheet away! By Jupiter! double or no double, we'll run that schooner down if wind is but vouchsafed us."

The order was obeyed, but in a very short time more wind was vouchsafed than was desirable.

Indeed, by sunset another black squall swooped down upon the sea so unexpectedly that the privateer's main-topgallant-mast was blown away before a man could be ordered into the shrouds, and ten minutes later it was blowing great guns.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE ENIGMA UNRIDDLED.

THOUGH for the ensuing hour or two the Sea Scout had all she could do to keep close-hauled, while the darkness and the storm were so great as to cause her officers to think of little else than her safety, she was kept as nearly upon her original course as was possible.

The result was that toward midnight, when the force of the wind had abated considerably, though the air was still heavily charged with electricity, there was an agreeable surprise.

It was one of those electrical storms peculiar to the tropics at certain seasons of the year, in which there is but little thunder, though a vast amount of lightning, chiefly of the sheet variety.

Suddenly now, in a flash of extraordinary duration and brilliancy, the schooner was perceived directly off the weather-bow, scarcely a mile away, and evidently laboring heavily in the big seas.

"Hurrah!" shouted Barnacle Ben, enthusiastically. "Now for the test of a sea-ghost's timbers! Summon Mr. Rafferty forward, Tom Simmons, and let him try the virtue of our bow-chaser upon this enigma of the seas."

The flash had died away, but only to be succeeded by others, and pretty soon when Rafferty got the chaser into line, there was the powder-flash to mingle with that of the storm.

The sea was running too high for much accuracy in firing to be achieved, but shot after shot was sent ricochetting over the stormy crests, sometimes luckily delivered, but mostly wide of the mark, and presently there were responses in kind from the schooner.

"It's tough wur-rk, your Honor, but Oi t'ink I'm getting me bearin's gradual-loike," said the master-gunner at last. "Shall Oi thry her wid a red-hot bullet prisenly?"

It should have been mentioned before this that the Scout had added to her armament the appliances for heating and loading hot cannon-shot, which had so surprised Barnacle Ben on board the Vixen, besides contributing so largely to her victory over that vessel, through the capture of a large store-ship, deeply laden with valuable military stores, but a few days following upon the great storm in which he had been washed away, together with Vanderspiegel and Anak.

"Not yet awhile, at all events," replied the young captain. "If the storm has crippled that schooner as much as seems to be the case, we may succeed in laying her aboard eventually. At all events, we can have no difficulty now in keeping her under our guns; and I'd rather reserve pirates for the hangman's offices than blow 'em sky-high any day in the week."

"All right, your Honor."

And the desultory firing was continued, still by the favor of occasional flashes of lightning, and with little or no effect on either side.

It was about this time that Jack Blackwell took an opportunity to draw his commander to one side, and clasp his hand.

"You think," he said, "that yonder is the Azrael, with our girls aboard?"

"What else should she be?"

"I'm not speculating, Captain Ben, but asking your opinion."

"Why, yes, then, I do think so."

"Then how about that other schooner, the double of this one, that was reflected on the sky-line beyond her?"

"I don't know."

"Neither do I; but if this should happen to be only the semblance, or ghost, of the real pirate, why, of course, neither Mary nor Mercy can be aboard—unless their individual doubles, into the bargain—and we are only throwing cannon-balls away at her."

"Jack, what foolishness are you maundering about? Do doubles, or ghosts, shoot back iron pills in response to those of the same sort?"

"I shouldn't think so."

"Well, two or three of that schooner's balls have come uncommonly close to us, as you must have noticed for yourself."

"That's true, by jingo!"

"Well, now, don't let me hear any more of this superstitious nonsense. If it should get among the men, we might be put to any amount of trouble."

But it had already got among the men, whether through the man at the helm overhearing the first ghostly talk with the Malay, before being relieved by one of the mates, or through some other instrumentality, it was never exactly discovered.

Ten minutes later, a delegation of reefers, headed by old Bumper, who had been promoted to the boatswain's position, came forward to the group about the bow-gun.

"Captain Harrup," the old fellow began, with much ceremony, "seein' as how we've heerd that we're at present engaged in fightin' an' out-an'-outer phantom ship, with Beelzebub himself in command—"

"Go to your quarters!" roared Barnacle Ben, in a white wrath. "Who the deuce has been stuffing your addle-pates with such old-woman's mush? By Jupiter—"

He was interrupted by a crash, and a cannon-ball from the schooner knocked one of the cat-heads into bits before passing over the bows, but with no other casualty than to bring old Bumper to the deck, with his wooden leg knocked from under him by a flying splint.

"Jeehosiphat, goshtall beeswax!" howled the capsized veteran; "another oak-pin gone to thunder, and never a pint o' grog to wash out the insult?"

His comrades burst into a roar of hoarse laughter.

"Look at that!" cried Captain Ben, quick to take advantage of their change of humor. "Whoever heard of a ghost's cannon-ball knocking a boatswain's best leg into smithereens?"

There was another roar at this, Uncle Joe was carried away, kicking, swearing, and that was the last grumbling on that score.

Just then Ben caught sight of the Malay's yellow face near at hand in a chance flash, the inevitable dog at his side.

"Here you, Allorma!" he said, angrily; "perhaps I owe ghost-grumbling to you?"

"By the Prophet's beard, you do not, señor!" was the earnest response. "I have spoken to no one."

"Well, well, let it go; but what do you think of your double by this time?"

"I don't know what to think, señor. We of the Azrael sighted the thing once before, to be sure; but then she never fired solid iron before to my knowledge."

Here the darkness shut down like a black wall, unrelieved by a single flash for a dozen minutes or so.

When at last there came another illuminating flash, it was an extra long and brilliant one, and a great shout rose from the privateer, which was echoed by a similar one from the schooner, both vessels standing revealed to each other on parallel crests not more than a cable's-length apart.

Then, out of the darkness as it shut down again, there bellowed a trumpet voice:

"Ahoy, there!" it thundered; "what ship are you?"

"Privateer Sea Scout!" was the trumpeted response.

"What have you been firing at me for?"

"Who are you?"

"Don't you know me, Captain Harrup?"

"No."

"I'm Captain Scudder, of the schooner Nemesis!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

OVER A FRIENDLY GLASS.

THE enigma of the pirate's double was unriddled at last, at least in a great degree.

Barnacle Ben at once recalled what had escaped his memory before—the recent bit of information as to Scudder having fitted out a schooner at Jamaica for the express purpose of hunting down the Azrael, and it was not much of a stretch of the imagination to supply the significance of the Englishman's having imitated the pirate's appearance in every particular to the best of his ability.

The news ran through the privateer like wildfire, and if there was disappointment at not having the real Azrael under her guns, instead of her counterfeit presentment, there was none the less a general hearty feeling at having found a friend in place of a foe.

The vessels remained in each other's company throughout the night, the storm meanwhile continuing to decrease, and after breakfast next morning Captain Scudder came on board the privateer to pay his respects.

"Never more astounded in my life, you know!" he exclaimed over the friendly glass, when the first greetings were exhausted. "Knew your ship at once, though, by that big revealing flash, of course."

"What had you taken us for?" demanded the commander of the Sea Scout.

"Demnition! deuced if I knew what to take you for, my boy. But as you had begun to bang away at me, you know, I was bound to bang away back again, in honor bound."

"And we big enough to eat up a pair of your size?"

"Aw! but what's the odds, you know, when a chap's mettle's at stake? Yes, thanks; looking toward you, old fellow!" And the glasses clinked amicably.

"But you had been pursuing the pirate prior to that?" continued Ben.

"Of course, or trying to. Gad! talk of a bulldog chasing a greyhound! She's a sea-witch, my boy; and nothing but a ruse or sheer good luck will ever hull her."

"That is to be seen. Before a tough gale and a long one, I believe the Scout can outsail her. However, what do you think we mistook you for?"

"The pirate herself, like enough. I had imitated the cut of her jib in every particular, and for obvious reasons."

"No; but her double—her ghost."

"What!" and the Englishman stared.

Then Barnacle Ben told him the whole story, whereat Captain Scudder laughed long and loud.

He was looking greatly improved in the smiles of his new fortune, and yet there was still the resolved, restless air about him, as of one in pursuit of a tantalizing and shifting goal.

"But, look you, my boy," continued the Englishman, soon recovering his seriousness, "we must devise some means of compassing this villain's capture between us, you know."

"I hope so."

"You heard of my extraordinary change of fortune?"

"Yes," and Ben related the manner of its coming to his knowledge. "And your new wealth didn't make any change in your plans. Captain Scudder, you are a splendid fellow."

"Nonsense! you seem to forget that my word had been given to one of the young ladies in that villain's power."

"I forgot nothing."

"Besides, you know, when I learned of that scoundrel, Manners," the captain frowned darkly, "having become a member of the pirate ship's company— Gad! it was too much for me."

"You heard of the good luck by which the villain managed to gain Captain Death's confidence?"

"I should say so!"

"But you doubtless know nothing of my experience with him anterior to that?"

"I don't know what you mean."

Then Ben related the story of his being cast away, and Manners's treachery following thereupon.

At first Scudder seemed to have difficulty in crediting what he heard.

"Good God!" he exclaimed; "why this is simply appalling. Even I, knowing the young scoundrel's character as I did, would not have deemed him capable of such an unheard of piece of utter, absolute, diabolical baseness as this. Good Lord! it simply causes one to lose all faith in human nature. But, look here, my boy, the young villain's subsequent success with Captain Death appears more intelligible now."

"In what way?"

"Why, don't you see, the pirate was of much the same sort when he was of Manners's age—though perhaps not quite so unrelievedly diabolical, for that would be an impossibility—and he would be apt to view such a youth's character as something like a chip of the old block—perhaps, even take a species of paternal pride in him, you know."

"Ah, I understand. But I should think for that very reason there would be a natural distrust between them. Equality in villainy does not always produce congeniality of feeling, I have noticed, even when springing from similarity of instincts."

"Aw! perhaps you are right. Never thought of it in that light before, you know. However," and Captain Scudder's countenance lengthened again, "what chance will those poor girls have between two such monsters? It is horrible to imagine!"

"But I can relieve you of some of your solicitude there," Barnacle Ben hastened to say. "I myself was wonderfully relieved on that score a few days ago."

"How was that?"

"I don't believe that Captain Death treats the unfortunate young women with anything but respect, or that he would allow Manners to annoy them."

"Bless me, this is quite astonishing, you know."

Ben then told him of the rescue of the Malay from the raft, and the disclosures that had followed.

"Bless me! but that is relieving," exclaimed Scudder, beaming all over. "Now I come to brush up my memory, Geoffrey Dunbar did have some praiseworthy instincts in him when a midshipman, devil-may-care rascal as he was for the most part."

"Have you thought of any plan by which we might maneuver together in effecting the Azrael's destruction or capture?"

"Not yet, my boy, though I've been turning it over in my mind pretty constantly since our recognition of last night."

"Did you really think of tackling the pirate single-handed?"

"Why, of course I did, my boy! Why not?"

"But what sort of show could you have?"

"God bless you, my boy! you don't know the Nemesis."

"Assuredly not," with a smile, "except as a sailor, captain."

"Well, she isn't bad as a skinner, either," complacently, "when pitted against anything else but the witch of a pirate herself, or perhaps a ship like your Sea Scout here."

"But even if you had been able to overhaul the Azrael?"

"I'd have knocked her endwise, or laid her by the board."

"Ah! I hope so!"

"But look here, my boy, you don't know my schooner. You must come aboard."

"Shall do so with pleasure."

"She's a fighter from the brine up!"

"That is a good thing in tackling a pirate."

"She's a water-bulldog and no mistake, you know. Her stern-gun is a brass thirty-two, equal to your own; her bow a beauty for a swivel; she has four twenty-fours besides; and, you may not believe it of her size, but her crew musters a hundred and ten, picked men every mother's son of 'em, with British Jack-tars in the preponderance."

"Come, that is not bad."

"I should say not!"

"Still, you could never have hoped to overhaul the pirate?"

"Well, there's always the chance of accident in one's favor, you know."

"A slight chance. But, honestly, captain, I don't see what she was running away from you for."

"Well—ur!—neither do I, to tell the truth; unless it might have been that she scented you behind me, or was intent to lead me on to the neighborhood of her favorite stronghold, where she might have met at her mercy."

"Where is that?"

"Los Corralitos."

"What and where are they?"

"Two wooded and rocky islets, I understand, in the cluster of islet-specks to the south of the Mariguana, in the Bahamas."

"Aha! never heard of 'em before."

"No? Well, I only did in this connection by the merest chance."

"The Azrael may be making for this retreat now."

"Shouldn't wonder."

"Why may it not be our opportunity?"

"Why not? In fact, I was intending to men-

tion it. If we only knew something about Los Corralitos!"

"Perhaps Allorma would be communicative."

"Who is Allorma? Ah, the chappy of the life-raft—the man with the dog?"

"Yes; I'll summon him at once."

CHAPTER XLV.

LOS CORRALITOS.

THE Malay was accordingly summoned, and came with the inevitable Bug at his heels.

"Allorma," said Barnacle Ben, pouring the man out a great glass of wine, "this is Captain Scudder, of the Azrael's double, which troubled you so much."

The Malay made his obeisance respectfully, and calmly swallowed the wine with his evil-looking eyes fixed upon the Englishman.

"Thanks, señors," he briefly replied, in his broken English mixed with Portuguese. "And can I be of any service, señors?"

"Yes, if you will."

"I owe you a kindness, señor, as you will doubtless remember."

And the man, who had respectfully taken a seat, let his hand fall caressingly on his dog's ugly head.

"Do you know *Los Corralitos*?" was the next question.

"As I do a quadrant, señor; or, what is better, as I know the points of the compass themselves."

"We want to know all you can tell us about the islets."

"Ah!" with a scowling pause; "that you may pocket Bully Captain Death there, is it not?"

"Exactly."

Allorma seemed to consider slowly, and then the scowl quitted his face, giving place to a calm but firm look.

"I'll do it!" he said, resolutely. "There is an oath to secrecy, to be sure; but pah!" with a finger-snap; "did he not raft me to die—me and Bug here? Señors, I am at your service."

"This is well, Allorma; and, if we are successful, you shall not go unrewarded."

"I shall only ask for a ship—schooner, or sloop, or a stanch craft of any sort—or its wherewithal."

"That you may turn pirate on your own account?"

"Señors," with a strange smile, "the sea keeps many secrets, and I keep mine."

"All right! In the first place do you think Captain Death is heading for his rendezvous now?"

"Without a doubt. It is high time he should bury his treasure, and the lesser *Corralito* is his planting-ground."

"Aha! What is the meaning of the name *Los Corralitos*, anyway?"

"The sheep fold."

"A queer sea name!"

"I suppose the bully buccaneers herded mutton, no less than beeves, there in the brave old days."

"What are *Los Corralitos*?"

"The gem-islets of a rock cluster that rise and sink again, as the case may be, and at any time. I have seen one or two of 'em do it with my own eyes."

"How may that be?"

"Earthquakes! They are the tops of sunken volcanoes."

"Ah! this is rather interesting."

"When you are away from them—yes, señor."

"Where do *Los Corralitos* lie?"

"A hundred miles southeast by east of Mariana."

"And to reach it from our present position?"

"Straight away due north by the Mona Passage, between Dominica and Porto Rique, then west by north, with a west bearing."

"Ah! four hundred miles at best."

"I should say so, señor, thereabouts. We should now be three hundred due west of Guadeloupe, in the Caribbees."

"You keep track well, Allorma; that is just about our position by sextant."

"I know my Spanish Main, señor."

"What is the nature of *Los Corralitos*, then?"

"There are two, the greater and the lesser—mountain-tops, rugged, rifted and wooded, springing from the ocean depths. The passage between is a labyrinth, a sinuous water-snake, sown at either end with reef-rocks, like rough-diamonds scattered out of the lap of a tropic queen. *Los Corralitos* are well-guarded parades, señors; the inhabitants are not wont to fear strange visitors, and the blue-black waters tell no tales."

His sallow cheeks flushed, while his sullen eyes sparkled, as if with adoration of the wild tropic scene that was before him.

"What!" exclaimed the young commander, "there are permanent inhabitants?"

"On the lesser islet only, señor; the larger is too precipitous for comfort."

"What sort of people?"

"The descendants of the bully buccaneers. There is scarcely a rover in the Azrael but what has his wife among them, to say nothing of families, while as for Bully Captain Death himself—"

The Malay shrugged his powerful shoulders, and finished with his disagreeable laugh.

"I understand. You speak of *Los Corralitos* being well-guarded?"

"Si, señor."

"By the outlying reefs, I suppose?"

"And the earthquakes."

"But are they so frequent just there?"

"Sefior," earnestly, "the rocks are at times lofty sea-marks, and are then gone—sunk out of sight. Sometimes they reappear, sometimes not. *Los Corralitos* themselves may vanish thus. Who knows? It is terrible, it is mysterious. The earthquakes are the sub-sea guardians of the bold folks there."

"So! And I suppose that Captain Death's retreat is somewhere in the midst of this intricate passage?"

"Señor, it is true; where else?"

"Can entrance be had at either end?"

"With a pilot, yes; but the eastern end is so difficult as to be seldom used."

"Not even by the Azrael?"

"Never; she always enters at the western end."

"Should we succeed in pocketing her there, could you pilot us in by the more difficult entrance?"

"Sefior, besides Bully Captain Death himself there is only one man in the world who can do that."

"Who is he?"

"Myself."

"But would you, and will you?"

"Sefior, God is great and Mahomet is his prophet!"

"That is not an answer to my question," impatiently.

"Pardon me, but I think it is."

"How so?"

"I am an humble servant of Mahomet, and therefore a hater of my enemies. Bully Captain Death rafted me to die."

"Strange he did not maroon you, instead."

"There was no griddle of sand at hand, or he would have done so."

"Well, you agree to be our pilot?"

"That depends, señor."

"On what?"

"On your agreement to my terms."

"What terms do you demand?"

The Malay drew a long breath.

"A one-hundredth share in all the treasure captured," he replied.

"Is there so much, then?"

"The Azrael is stuffed with it now. But this is nothing to what is buried away on *Corralito Chiquito*, or the lesser *Corralito*."

Barnacle Ben looked askance at the Englishman who as yet had not said a word.

CHAPTER XLVI.

TEASURE-WARD HO!

CAPTAIN SCUDDER slowly drained his glass, and then looked meditatively at the Malay, whom he secretly confessed to be much of an enigma to him.

"How much treasure is buried on the island?" he asked, in response to Captain Ben's look of inquiry, but with his eyes fixed upon Allorma.

"It is incomputable," replied the Malay, with suppressed excitement. "A kingdom's ransom."

"But do you know where it is buried?"

"I am the only man living who does know, apart from Bully Death himself."

"How is that?"

"I was his only trusted man in that respect, save only the negro slaves who would do the hard work when a fresh plant was to be made, and their fidelity was assured."

"In what way?"

"Oh, simply enough," indifferently. "Always, when the excavation was made and the treasure-chest placed, we knocked the blacks on the head, chucked 'em in on top of the chest, and filled in the hole."

"Good God!"

"Mahomet is his prophet, señor. Yes, we were always conscientiously circumspect in that line. Besides, the bodies covered up the boxes and kept them from the first contact with the dirt, which was very desirable."

The Englishman made a gesture of horror, and hastily filled and drained his glass again.

"I grant this—man his terms, if you agree to them," he said, turning to the young commander. "Pah! Suppose you come with me on the Nemesis. I feel like a change of air."

The interview accordingly terminated with the acceptance of the Malay's terms.

At evening of that same day both privateer and schooner were sheeted away for the Mona Passage, and thenceforth *Treasureward ho!* was the watchword of the Sea Scout's cruise.

The trades were blowing easily from the southeast, so that a prosperous run was anticipated for both vessels with the wind upon their starboard quarter, for when the trade winds once set fairly in for the summer in that latitude, they are apt to last unbrokenly for many days, though likely to freshen into a gale under certain conditions.

Three days later, when standing through the Mona Passage, at about nightfall, they sighted another burning ship, which gave evidences, on

examination, of having been fired, after first being gutted by the pirates.

The vessel blew up when the pirate-chasers were quite close at hand.

Among the charred fragments scattered over the waters was the name-board, which was picked up by one of the Sea Scout's boats.

It bore the name, "Santa Maria de Seville," as the only identifying relic of this latest victim of the dreaded Azrael's scourging sweep.

At early morning of the eighth day *Los Corralitos* were first sighted with the glass.

A little later on, a small brig, dismasted and seemingly abandoned, was observed floating aimlessly at the caprice of wind and current.

A boat from each of the pirate-hunters board-ed the wreck.

Her deck contained a dozen or more corpses, freshly slain, and there were evidences of the vessel having been fired in several places, though for some reason or other the flames had died out without spreading.

The boarding parties were viewing the tragic sight, before continuing their examination be-low, when a low moan attracted their attention.

Entering the cabin from which it proceeded, another piteous spectacle met their eyes.

An old man, terribly wounded but still alive, was half reclining upon a settle in the richly-appointed little saloon, with the lifeless form of a young woman, still singularly beautiful, in his arms.

Both were richly dressed, and even in his despair the old man retained an air of distinction.

"My daughter!" he wailed, when he had been somewhat relieved and his wound attended to; "my idolized Inez! Dead, dead, dead! Wolves of the sea! could they not have been content with my life and spared thine?"

He spoke in Spanish, ending with a despairing moan.

He was carried to the privateer, together with the corpse of the young lady, from which he wildly refused to be separated; while the brig, being already in a hopelessly sinking condition, with nothing left in her of much value, was given to the flames.

When the old gentleman had become com-paratively composed, with his wound easier, he testified his willingness to being questioned with regard to the tragedy by Captain Scudder, who spoke Spanish fluently, Barnacle Ben being also present.

"What is your name and position, señor?" was the first query.

"I am Scipio de Rivo, Count of Chaco, of Barcelona, in Spain, and now, alas! the last of my race, señors," was the weeping rejoinder.

"Your vessel?"

"Was my own, the *Spiritu del Santo*. With my beloved Inez—last flower of my ancient stock, the divine jewel of my declining years!—and the greater part of my personal property, I quitted Barcelona in her, bound for my sugar estate in Porto Rico, two months ago. *Madre de Dios!* we had the most excellent voyaging fortune until this tragedy overwhelmed us, as by the black shadow of Death's wing itself."

"It was, indeed, such a shadow—the shadow of the pirate Azrael, whose captain even borrows the name of the King of Terrors himself!" said the Englishman, solemnly.

"Alas! do I not know it to my destruction, señor?"

"When were you overtaken by the corsair?"

"At daybreak of to-day. The pirate was slipping in among the reefs of those two moun-tainous islands to the northward when he des-cried us, and all was lost!"

"What! the pirate schooner was really mak-ing her way in between the mountain islets from the west?"

"Yes, señor; and she even continued on her way, leaving us to cherish the phantom hope that we had escaped her attention. A cheating phantom, indeed, it proved!

"Two boats, crowded with her cut-throats, were seen pulling out from among the rocks and heading for us. Oh, the horror of what followed, señors!"

"We offered no resistance, but in less time than I can tell it, our ship's company, with the exception of my idolized daughter and myself, were ruthlessly butchered to a man."

"The leader of the pirate murderers was a handsome young Englishman, as I could guess by the nature of his oaths, though he was also familiar with my native tongue.

"We had barricaded ourselves in the cabin when he burst in the door, followed by a brace of his bravos, and at once made a clutch at my child while giving me this bullet-wound in the breast which is still causing me such torture."

"Wounded as I was, I appealed to his human-ity in her favor, as she fled, shrieking, here and there about the saloon, from the clutch of his bloody hands."

"Away, dotard!" he cried, with a brutal laugh; "youth and beauty are not amiss in the sea rover's treasure-quest." And he aimed a fresh pistol at my already bleeding breast. But my daughter at the same instant covered me with her angelic form, her arms twining my

neck, and the second death-shot, intended for my finishing-stroke, passed through her noble heart.

"The fiend dashed down his pistol, with a curse of baffled rage, and rushed out of the cabin, with his attendant hell-dogs, slamming the door shut behind him.

"I heard the villains sacking the brig for hours after that, but was not molested with my dead. They must have carried away many boat-loads of plunder. Then I was left alone, and remained thus, till your sailors found me. But I feel that my wound is mortal, that I shall not be long apart in spirit from my beloved child, that—"

Here a dreadful hemorrhage unexpectedly interrupted his feeble utterance, and it only ended with the old man's death.

Father and child were given an ocean burial with such solemnities as could be improvised, Captain Scudder reading the appropriate service.

The information as to the pirate's movements, however, was of inestimable value; inasmuch as it was now certain that the Azrael had sought her hidden retreat in among the water-intricacies of Los Corralitos.

CHAPTER XLVII.

FEELING THE WAY.

DIRECTLY following upon the burial of the old hidalgo and his daughter, which had taken place under the soft splendor of the tropic stars, the course of both privateer and schooner was, on the advice of Allorma, the Malay, slightly changed, so as to skirt the entire islet-group, of which Los Corralitos formed the central feature, in order to come in at the eastern end of the narrow strait between those two islands.

"But," Barnacle Ben queried of the Malay, Captain Scudder being also present, "what will have prevented the pirates or the islanders in their interest from descrying our first approach from one or another of the lofty eminences on which they would naturally have lookouts posted."

"You mustn't forget that it was nearly nightfall when we first sighted the islands ourselves," replied the Malay. "Besides, there are other things in our favor."

"What are they?"

"First, the pirates are not accustomed to post lookouts on the island steeps. They do not regard it worth their while, inasmuch as most vessels give Los Corralitos a wide berth by reason of their perilous reefs; and besides, they feel so secure in their retreat that little apprehension would have been occasioned even had they sighted our approach, which is not probable.

"Then the arrival of the Azrael at her secret moorings is an occasion for general merry-making on the part of the islanders and her crew. She is at once stripped of her plunder, pending a division of the cash part of it, and after that she is got upon some improvised ways for a thorough examination of her hull; this last being an imperative duty now, inasmuch as her last cruise has been an exceptionally long and stormy one. After that there is a general carouse, and the bravos are doubtless at it by this time.

"Then, again, didn't you chance to feel a strange sort of thump on the bottom of the ship while the funeral ceremonies were under way?"

"Yes," replied Ben, while the Englishman looked up with a quick, interested glance. "I did notice that, and thought it a queer sort of a wave-thump at the time."

"It was a queer one; it was a preliminary tap of the *terramote*—the earthquake's terrible hammer-shock."

"What?"

"Seniors, it is true. It must be the big season for them now. This is said to occur just hereabouts every nine years. How truly, I know not. But I know that it is just nine years ago that the last long-continued disturbances took place—nine years ago this very month of May."

"With what result?"

"Reefs rose and sunk; some of the shocks were mere little quivers, others were like a crashing together of the rock-ribs under the sea; Little Corralito nodded and courtesied to Big Corralito, which was not slow to return the compliment. By the blood of the Prophet, it was appalling. And yet, strangely enough, the disturbance of the sea itself was not so great as might have been expected. A few long, glassy swells, seeming to come from somewhere on the other side of the world, and dashing themselves high against Gull Rock. That was all. In a wind-storm, it might have been different. But it was pretty calm, as it mostly is, I am told, at such times—*about as calm as it is now*."

"What is Gull Rock?" asked Scudder, moving somewhat uneasily in his seat, as did Ben also.

"A mighty rock half a mile outside the eastern entrance into the strait. If we can reach it before daybreak, it will serve to conceal us finely until we are ready to pull in with sweeps through the myriads of low rocks."

"And how wide is the strait itself—wide enough for both vessels to pull in abreast?"

"Oh, yes, easily; the rocks once escaped which I shall pilot you through; half a mile wide, at least, and never narrowing to much less than half that breadth."

"And how far in is the pirates' lair?"

"About two miles. The entire strait is about four miles long, with the lagune in the center, and the island village on the bank."

"But look here," interposed the privateer's commander: supposing the earthquake season to be upon us—"

The Malay suddenly held up his hand, bending his ear to listen, while the dog at his side cuddled with a low, uneasy whine still closer to his feet.

"It is upon us!" he whispered. "wait a minute; there!"

There came a slight shock under the ship, just perceptibly different from that of an ordinary wave, and yet sufficient to cause both Ben and the Englishman to start up.

"What I was going to say," continued Ben, resuming his seat with a rather unsuccessful effort at composure, "is this: How should the earthquake disturbances, if they occur with force, benefit us in our contemplated attack?"

The Malay, who had alone remained as cool as the proverbial cucumber, smiled in his disagreeable way, which was but little improvement upon his favorite scowl.

"The islanders don't like earthquakes, señores," he replied. "You might think they would get used to them, but landsmen never do. They grow frantic. All that the true sea-rovers can do to quiet them while a big shock is on tap, as it were, is of no more avail than a forgotten sky-sail in a hurricane. Piff! bang! rumble! pound! They are no longer men and women, but grasshoppers. Nor can you blame their cowardice, either. How do they know what moment their mountain-top of an island may be turned upside down, or crushed in at the edges like a smashed egg? Ah, señores! believe me, if we are so fortunate as to make our attack in an earthquake, the bully islanders will be busy enough with their own affairs. Bully Captain Death and his bravos into the bargain, more than likely."

"Yes," grunted Scudder, "but let us not forget that what is bad for one may be quite as bad for the other, you know. Gad! taken altogether, you know, I'd rather depend upon human agencies than upon such fickle auxiliaries."

The Malay shrugged his shoulders.

"Of course, we take the risks," he said, complacently. "What is ordered is ordered, and nothing we can do will alter the decree of Fate."

"Decree of bosh!" cried Scudder, angrily, his Church of England orthodoxy rising against this cynical fatalism. "We are in the hands of Heaven, and if we do but our duty—"

He was cut short by another sub-sea thump, which caused the vessel to shiver from stem to stern.

At the same time there was heard some confusion on deck, and third mate Blackwell appeared at the cabin-door to say that the ship must have scraped a rock.

"Not a rock, but an earthquake," said Barnacle Ben, with assumed indifference. "Assure the men that there is no danger, and prepare them for more of the same sort."

The shocks continued at intervals during the remainder of the night, but without any increased force.

An hour before daylight, the moon shining brilliantly, both vessels were noiselessly brought to anchor near the massive rock-islet known as Gull Rock.

Preparations were already making for pulling them in with sweeps as soon as it should be light enough, and both Barnacle Ben and Captain Scudder (the latter was now spending the greater portion of his time on the larger vessel for consultations), were looking up at the tall black wall of the sheer cliff before them from the poop-deck of the Sea Scout, when suddenly a loud cry from the lookout rung startlingly through the ship.

"A big wave from the east!" was yelled. "Good Lord! it's like the whole sea itself in one wave."

Such a wave! Impossible! for all but a dead calm had fallen upon the face of the surrounding waters.

And yet at this juncture there came the sharpest under-throb yet experienced under the ship's bottom; then the anchor stays snapped like so many threads, and they felt the ship rising, rising, until it seemed that the sea would lift them to the very stars.

Heavens! they were on a level with the summit of the very rock that had towered so high above them but a moment before.

Then it sunk below them, and they felt that the subsidence must hurl them against its massive crest.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE EARTHQUAKE'S MIGHT.

BUT, no; they had seen over the top of Gull Rock, and were already on the downward slope of the great sea-like billow, and on, on, on they were sweeping toward Los Corralitos, against whose shores the wave could be seen expending

itself in terrific lashings, and yet the black cliff was still no longer in sight.

"Let go the anchors again!" shouted the Malay, whose voice was to be the pilot instructions for both vessels now but a cable's length apart. "They may hold this time, and then be ready with the sweeps."

The order was obeyed, and luckily the anchors held ground, though at a straining cost upon the stout cables.

But there was no immediate repetition of the giant swell, and between the ship's bows and the shore the sea could be seen torn into foam by the hundreds of black intervening reefs cropping out at irregular intervals.

"How in the world did we pass around Gull Rock?" exclaimed Barnacle Ben, looking around in vain for the great isolated cliff.

"Blessed if I know, you know!" cried Scudder. "I made sure we would break our back on its summit."

"Seniors," said Allorma, calmly, "we did not pass around but *overit*. Gull Rock is sunk from view forevermore!"

Before they could get over this astounding announcement, there was a chorus of cries, and a hundred hands were pointing out beyond the spot where Gull Rock had been.

"Look, look!" cried a medley of voices; "it rises, it rises! Is it a whale's back, or an island?"

Slowly out of the bosom of the deep the dark object under observation made its appearance, the water slipping noiselessly off from it.

"It is another rock!" said the Malay, as composed as before, "a new island!"

So it was. It continued to rise, and at last came to a pause, of lesser height but greater bulk than the sunken giant which it in a certain measure replaced, a new embattlement of the mysterious sea!

"Sweeps out, anchors in!" presently roared Allorma. "Keep where you are till I give the word!"

There was of necessity some delay in executing this double order, but it was done for the next great swell that came rolling shoreward.

Allorma darted in among the men on the privateer, instructing them how to manage the sweeps so as to counter the effects of the swell, and his instructions were likewise heard and followed on board the Nemesis, which, being much the smaller vessel, was relatively more easy to manage.

Again the vessel rose towering upon the summit of the swell.

As they did so the mountain islets of Los Corralitos, less than a mile away seemed to be slowly sinking, while the water-slope down to their shores was correspondingly steep and smooth as glass.

But the great sweeps were busily at work, and both vessels feathered stationarily on top of the crest with superb precision.

"Be ready to pull in, following the Scout's wake, when I give the word!" shouted Allorma to the schooner. "It will be all right with the next shoreward sweep."

Then the sea began to descend, there came a rumbling subterranean, submarine roar, the two islands could be seen to shake visibly, and the fringes of the return wave hurled themselves madly against the rock-bound shores.

Simultaneously with this, the reflection of the rising day from the eastern horizon wall began to gleam rosily over the sea, and to penetrate far up into the broad estuary dividing the Corralitos.

"Give way!" at last cried the Malay, springing to the privateer's wheel.

The great sweeps, four on each side, rose and fell, and the sailless vessel shot straight forward, surely guided, toward a spot directly between two half-sunken reefs, over which the water was boiling with caldron-like fury, the Nemesis following straight in her wake.

The passage was made successfully, but other reefs rose so multitudinously and unexpectedly beyond and around that they seemed to be maliciously thrusting themselves up out of the water for the express purpose of goring the sides of the artificial Leviathan in the lead.

But the sweeps rose and fell with superb precision, with a vast power in every stroke, and the Malay at the wheel seemed possessed of a hand of iron and a foresight little short of a wizard's.

At all events, there wasn't a black rock that he evaded not, though often by so close a shave that it seemed all but miraculous that the wooden sides should escape the grinding contact that would seal their fate, and there seemed to be not a suspicious water-swirl whose lurking, invisible peril he did not divine and provide against.

The glorious sun rose up behind them, flooding the world with his hot brightness, and with the two vessels still tortuously feeling their way toward the estuary's mouth through the labyrinthian outer reefs.

"Courage!" at last shouted the Malay for the last time. "But one more peril, and we are in deep soundings!"

The peril in question was a trying one—a scattering cluster of sunken and half-sunken rocks, extending almost completely across the

inlet-entrance, among which the water was lashing itself into a seemingly pathless waste of snowy foam.

But he plunged the Scout's prow fearlessly right into the heart of the shoals.

The sweep-blades time and again struck rock instead of water, but there was not a scrape as yet upon the ship-sides.

Yes; there was one now—a harsh grating sound; but no sooner heard than silenced, and the scowling, swarthy face bending over the wheel was as implacable as if cut out of bronze.

Then there was a tremendous cheer, and the noble privateer slipped safely into the smooth, deep inner water, the schooner lightly following, and the last peril of the terrible ordeal was passed.

A few minutes later, the entrance between the islands was passed, and, as Allorma composedly relinquished the wheel to the sailor from whom he had taken it, his dog licked one of his hands and fawned upon him lovingly.

"Seniors," he said, turning indifferently to the group of officers who had anxiously surrounded him from the first, "I hope I have fulfilled my agreement to your satisfaction."

For answer Barnacle Ben silently grasped one of his hands, and the Englishman the other.

There might be blood on those hands, and they doubtless were stained with many a ruthless crime, but the iron and intelligence of tremendous manhood was in them still, and they had wrought faithfully and well on this occasion at least.

At this juncture there was a shot, and the splinters flew from the tip of the privateer's bowsprit.

CHAPTER XLIX. THE PIRATE'S LAIR.

THE Malay pointed to a spot high up on the steep of the greater island, whence a thin wreath of rising smoke betrayed the source of the unexpected cannon-shot.

"The earthquakes," said he, "have not kept the sea-rovers so busy but that they have had time to plant a gun up there. But you ought to silence it with a few shots of your bow-chaser."

Here there was another shot from the steep, but aimed so high that it went clean over the tops of both vessels, which were now abreast, and advancing slowly up the estuary.

Then both Rafferty and the chief gunner on the Nemesis got in their fine work with their bow-guns, and the earth, stones and branches were soon set to flying about the masked gun on the mountain-side.

It made but one reply.

Then there was observed a scampering of agile figures around a lofty angle of rock, after which there was the plunge of some great, cumbersome object over and over down the face of the mountain, till it finally disappeared with a far-away crash amid the thick bowering of its forested foot.

It was the pirate's one mountain-planted cannon, torn from its perch and tumbled into the depths, and they did not attempt to mount another.

There was now no further attempt at concealment on the part of the assailants.

Slowly and majestically up the broad strait swept privateer and schooner, the great sweeps dipping the water with a grace and ease in strange contrast with the great labor in working them from the decks.

"Mark that rocky bend ahead, seniors," said Allorma, pointing away. "At that turn the way grows narrower and crooked. And unless they hazard a boat attack upon us, we can depend upon it that the Azrael is not so far dismantled as yet but that they will attempt a retreat by the western channel."

"But is there a chance of their succeeding in that case?" inquired Barnacle Ben, anxiously.

"I think not, señor," was the reply, "for the earthquakes—and more of them are to come—will have more likely altered the rocks and channels on that side than on this. But still it would be their better chance, if they could avail themselves of it."

"Heaven forbid that they should run away, you know!" exclaimed Scudder. "That would be too bad!"

But the pirates had no intention of running away, as was presently made sufficiently evident.

As yet not a trace of life had been observed on the lesser island, which was said to be the only one regularly inhabited, save that now and then there were glimpses of flocks and herds among the comparatively low-lying glades and wooded slopes.

At last there came a slight jar of water and earth, as if to warn of the still existing disquietude in the bowels of the solitude, after which all was quiet again.

Then the vessels rounded the bend that had been pointed out.

As they did so a vision of wonderful beauty was unfolded.

The perspective of the narrowing waterway seemed to be altogether lost in the bowering junction of the two islands, whose masses of verdure clung together as if wholly barring

penetration beyond a certain point about half a mile away.

But the Malay said that this was only a deception, and that, when once well up to the apparent obstruction, the channel, after a yet narrower curve, would suddenly broaden out into the lake-like lagune which was the very heart of the pirates' lair.

On, therefore, slowly and surely, swept the ships, directly toward the apparently impenetrable verdure wall.

Then came the surprise.

There was a combined yell, as of a thousand tongues out of Pandemonium, and out of that bowering greenery burst the pirate boats, crammed with desperadoes, and rushing down upon the intruders with long and rapid strokes.

There were six boats in all, with an average of a dozen fighters in each. Nor was this all. Two immense rafts, covered with armed men (who probably comprised the entire fighting population from among the islanders proper) and propelled by sweeps, came following the boats, though at a less rapid speed.

They had no cannon, but kept up an almost incessant musketry fire as they came, and almost before the surprise of their unexpected appearance had died away, the two foremost boats, Captain Death himself prominently in command of one, Manners of the other, were within a cable's length of the invaders.

But the latter were not caught altogether unawares.

The sweeps had been instantly abandoned, and the men brought to quarters, while Rafferty's first discharge of canister from the bow-gun of the privateer fairly riddled the third boat in the line, tumbling its inmates, wounded and bleeding for the most part, into the water as she filled. An equally lucky shot from the schooner landed a solid shot in the middle of the foremost raft, literally knocking it to pieces; while at the first volley of musketry from the decks the crowds in the two foremost boats were terribly cut up, temporarily checking the pirate captain's individual prowess as three of his rowers fell back, the oars dropping from their nerveless hands.

"You should be thankful for this, seniors!" said the Malay, who was standing abaft the bow-gun, along with Ben and others. "Their ship was too far dismantled to be brought into action, or to run away. Aha, Bully Captain Death! I may pay off that old score now."

He stepped upon the bulwark rail, leveling a musket at the master-pirate, who was also observed to snatch up a piece at the same instant,

"Crack!" went the guns at the same moment, their reports hardly distinguishable over the general din.

The pirate was left standing, a sardonic smile upon his bearded lips.

Allorma was down on the deck, a bullet in his breast, his dog standing at his side, licking an outstretched hand, and giving utterance to dolorous howls.

Both Ben and Scudder bent over the man.

"It is fate—be kind to my dog!" was all he said, and his strange spirit had taken its flight.

A moment later a random bullet struck the inconsolable brute, and, with a last mournful howl, he was dead upon his master's breast.

Allorma was a mysterious ruffian, and, save his strange name, nothing of his history, doubtless sufficiently remarkable, was ever known.

Barnacle Ben had sprung to a commanding attitude once more.

"Steady there to resist boarders!" he shouted. "Knife, cutlass and hatchet! beat them off at any cost!"

Scudder had signaled for a boat to take him to his own vessel, but none could venture the crossing-space, narrow as it was, so ferocious was the storm of bullets being exchanged.

His subordinate officers seemed to be doing all that could be expected of them, so he concluded to remain where he was.

The pirates had continued to advance, but with their boats' crews sadly shattered.

At this juncture the second raft was struck by another round-shot from the Nemesis's gun, which partly demolished her, throwing more than half the living cargo into the water.

But now the tragedy below as well as over the tide began to be enacted. The ominous black fins of the monsters of the deep began to cut the water everywhere among the swimming and struggling forms, while there were frequent shrieks as one by one they were dragged under by the remorseless jaws.

However, at this moment three of the pirate's boats succeeded in making fast to the Scout's bows, and then the bravos were swarming at either rail.

In the first confusion of the fight, Barnacle Ben sprung upon the bulwarks and aimed a cutlass blow at Manners's head just as it was rising above it.

As he did so his foot, unfortunately, slipped upon a clout of blood, and he fell headlong into the shark-infested waves.

CHAPTER L. THE TUG OF WAR.

THE young commander had about given himself up for lost, for scarcely had he disappeared

under the blood-streaked surface of the water before a powerful nip closed upon his shoulder.

"A shark's jaws, of course!" he thought to himself, and was then resigning himself to the inevitable.

But no; the next instant that powerful grip had landed him into one of the boats, already half-filled with maimed and blaspheming cut-throats, and Anak, its owner, who had plunged into the water after him, with a cutlass between his teeth, sprung into the boat likewise, furiously slashing at the legs of the pirates who were still endeavoring to surmount the privateer's rail.

Ben snatched a cutlass from one of the wounded men around him, and at once set about seconding the heroic black in his efforts.

"Steady there!" roared the strong voice of Captain Scudder above. "They are already foiled—once more now and they are done for!"

But at this instant there came another earthquake shock that seemed to rattle up every drop of water in the estuary, while the strong frame of the privateer shivered in every fiber as if smitten by an enemy's broadside.

Then the water was churned up into maddening waves, pirates and not a few of their enemies came pitching and tumbling headlong down the ship's side into the boats, into the water, pell-mell, even the sharks for the time being fled affrighted to the outer depths, and the shores of the narrow stream seemed toppling toward one another.

Ben was doing his best to merely retain his foothold in the boat, when the body of a pirate, pistol in one hand, cutlass in the other, came sprawling down from above, knocking him off his pins.

It was Manners.

They had recognized each other and were up at the same instant.

The ex-lieutenant was the quickest with his weapon, and, firing his pistol point-blank at the other, with a muttered curse, he jumped overboard, and instantly disappeared.

Barnacle Ben had reeled to one side at the critical moment.

This movement was followed by a hoarse roar, together with a gnashing of teeth, like that of an enraged wild beast.

It was from Anak, who had caught the bullet full in his breast.

"My God! that was intended for me," cried Ben, in a sudden agony of consternation.

But the great negro's fury had given way to another emotion, and he burst into a harsh laugh.

"Bullet sting, no more!" he cried. "Come, Marse Ben! plenty more pirate to be killed, plenty, plenty!"

With that, he grasped the young man with one mighty hand, a dangling rope with the other, and, in spite of his wound, with his cutlass again between his teeth, was pulled up over the rail by several of the victorious sailors who had witnessed the incident from above.

"Thank God, you are safe!" exclaimed Captain Scudder, grasping the young commander's hand. "I thought you gone. But they're well beaten off, and all is well so far."

"Oh, no, no!" cried Ben, in sudden grief.

"All cannot be well, for look here!"

And then he was on his knees beside Anak, who, exhausted by this great effort and his fast-bleeding death-wound, was at last prostrate on the deck, unable to move.

"Plenty pirate, Marse Ben—kill, kill!" he muttered hoarsely. "Good by—tell my ole Susan—"

That was all; he was dead.

"A braver spirit, a more unselfish soul never found dwelling-place in mortal clay!" cried Ben, wildly.

"Dot ish zo, gaptain," faltered Van, the fat steward, who at that moment came lumbering up, with his hands pressed upon his paunch. "No petter mans effer drawed der life of breath dan Anak, dough he pe now deader dan some door-nails. Oh, my Gott! put mine pelly hurts. Zome veller bits me in der pread-pasket mit zome marline-spiges!"

Then there was a fresh sensation on the crowded deck, and Uncle Joe Bumper came stumping along, roaring out a war-song, and with a bottle of spirits under either arm.

But the three mates were fast conjuring order out of the confusion, and it was evident that the pirates had been badly thrashed off at every point.

Many had been killed, still more wounded, drowned, or converted into shark-food, and the remnant of their broken force was beating a retreat in the three boats that were left to them and on what was left of the larger raft.

Both Captain Death and Manners were among the escaping villains, as they could be plainly recognized in one boat.

In addition to the fight for the mastery of the privateer, a portion of the larger raft, with a strong force of desperadoes clinging to it, had been made fast to the Nemesis, but the attack had been repulsed with comparative ease.

The water had now once again resumed its natural appearance, and the sharks were once more exploring its surface and depths for a continuance of their horrid meal.

"It was a good fight," said Barnacle Ben, sadly, "but it has cost us dear. There must be fifty of our brave fellows among the killed and wounded."

Scudder had by this time regained his own deck, and shouted over to his ally that the sweeps should be got in readiness for continuing the attack with the least possible delay.

This plan was acted upon, and, half an hour later, the vessels were again pushing on up the estuary, the privateer now in the lead by reason of the growing narrowness of the channel.

As they advanced, the two islands were seen to have come together only in appearance, the view once more spreading out between the mountains as the curve was made, while gleaming at the extreme end of the narrowing perspective was the broad lagune into which the pirates had made their escape, with outcropping rocks at the foot of the forested mountain on either side.

The Scout had been pulled nearly through the pass into the lagune, when some one yelled out:

"Oh, Lord! look at the wave behind us."

Then every one saw it—a wall of water rolling up the river as high as an ordinary house—and Barnacle Ben, under the influence of the surprise, ordered the anchor to be let go.

This was fortunately done on the instant, and it saved the privateer from destruction.

The anchor held, chiefly by reason of the slack cable to spare, notwithstanding that the ship at once began to lift straight up perpendicularly on the incoming wave.

Then there was a cry that the island to the left was sinking away, and at the same time the Nemesis, having failed to get out an anchor, was borne swiftly by like a mere chip on the crest of the water wall.

CHAPTER LI.

"AMID THE CLASH OF WORLDS."

COURAGEOUS to the last, Captain Scudder had waved his hand to Barnacle Ben in passing, as if with an everlasting farewell.

"Good-by, my boy!" he had phlegmatically shouted. "I rather think we are done for, you know."

Then the schooner was far ahead, well on into the lake-like space, where, with the subsidence of the wave, she settled with a crash upon a sharp-ridged rock, and broke her back on the spot, though still clinging high out of water in the middle, though touching it at either end.

There was only the one wave, and the privateer speedily cut away her anchor, the sweeps were once more out, and then she was alongside her unfortunate consort, whose crew were already taking to the boats.

Looking on into the lagune and beyond, the pirate schooner was seen to have been lifted from her ways and thrust hard against the bank of the larger island to the north, where her inmates, now intent upon anything but fighting, were swarming out and doing their best to make her fast to trees at the water's edge.

At the same time the wildest confusion was rife upon the lesser and lower island which formed the bank of the estuary to the left, and which was slowly and surely settling down beneath the waves.

The village of the islanders consisted of a large collection of huts and cabins in the center of a broad and lovely open valley, and out of these men, women and children were fleeing distractedly in the most terrible dismay this way and that, but all evidently with the same panicky hope of reaching the rising mountain-slopes to the back and at either side of their plateau.

But of what avail, when their whole island, mountain and all, was sinking and falling away into the bosom of the sea.

At first the young commander could not credit the evidence of his senses, but the truth of the spectacle was momentously enforcing itself.

"Let go your anchor, if you've got one left!" shouted Scudder from the broken deck of the Nemesis, which still remained fast upon her rock, and whose crew were rapidly transferring themselves to the privateer's decks. "We're still safe on this side, my boy, though there'll be a big hole in the water over yonder presently."

Ben gave the order thus prompted, and fortunately the anchor held.

The lesser island did not seem to be so much settling down as settling away—falling back, as it were, as if the entire mountain that composed it was toppling out and over into the depths.

The water was already over the village site, steadily rising inch by inch, and the awful spectacle of an entire population, perhaps numbering a thousand souls, being slowly and inevitably overwhelmed was being enacted under the very eyes of the Scout's and the wrecked schooner's crews.

The boats of both vessels were now out, and, in spite of the awful situation to the left, preparations were under way for a final attack upon the Azrael now securely lashed to the north island, which still remained immovable.

Barnacle Ben was in the lead in his largest

cutter when Scudder swept up in command of his jolly-boat.

"For the pirate, my boy!" he shouted. "The ladies first—chaos afterward, if need be!"

A few shots were fired from the Azrael as the boats swept across the lagoon and made fast; but a few moments later the victorious sailors were swarming unobstructedly over her side.

Then a large force of rovers, who had been waiting quietly aft, with their captain at their head, made their final rush upon the boarders.

But they were outnumbered two to one; Captain Death himself went down among the first, shot through the heart, and his followers were speedily cut to pieces or driven overboard, into the water or out upon the mountain-side to which the craft was moored.

Even those battle-tried, murder-stained braves, desperate as they remained, were seemingly paralyzed by the awful scenes that were going on around them, and their destruction was rather a slaughter than a battle.

"Speak, scoundrel!" hissed out Barnacle Ben—he was kneeling upon a prostrate pirate's breast, his knife at his throat; "the young ladies—where are they?"

"Up in the woods yonder," was the gasped reply. "No harm has ever come to them."

"The ship here, is it ruined?"

"Not to my knowledge."

He turned over the man as a prisoner to several of his sailors.

At that moment there was a glad cry from the shore.

"Benjamin, dear Benjamin, here we are!" cried a well-remembered voice.

It was Mercy Lord's.

She was standing with Mary Harrup in a little open space up on the mountain-side, and both Captain Scudder and Jack Blackwell were with them already.

Ben gave but one look, and was then ashore.

The next moment his beautiful betrothed was weeping and laughing hysterically in his arms.

Mary Harrup was enacting a similar sensational part, with Jack Blackwell as her consoler.

"Really, now, this is quite interesting, you know," observed the Englishman, stroking his chin. "Don't know as I even ever read anything quite so dramatic and touching, by Jove!"

Then Ben had seized one of his hands, Mercy the other, and he was discovering that, far from being *de trop*, he was being fairly overwhelmed with their gratitude, and a most desirable feature in the tableau of the lovers rejoined.

A motionless body was lying a short distance away, which proved to be the lifeless remains of Eugene Manners, with a bullet-hole between the eyes.

"I had to do it, you know, my boy," explained the Englishman, apologetically. "Poetic justice demanded that he should fall by your hand—I am aware of that—but bless me! his pistol was already leveled at me, and my only chance was in being a little quicker than he."

They presently started to descend to the water's edge, when Scudder suddenly extended his hand with an exclamation.

Then they all stood in a spell of awe and amazement.

Their eyes roved away to the southward over a vast space of open sea, upon which the waves were dancing and leaping gayly.

The lagune, the estuary itself was a thing of the past.

There was no sister island, no Lesser Corralito, no companion mountain-islet.

All had disappeared in the bosom of the sea!

CHAPTER LII.

CONCLUSION.

BUT the gallant privateer herself was still stanch and sound, and the Azrael was her prize.

Much treasure was found in the latter; which the pirates had not had time to remove, and which was speedily transferred to the Sea Scout.

As for the Nemesis, though still sticking fast with her broken back upon her rock, it was obvious that she could not last long in that condition.

Work was therefore at once begun upon transferring such of her contents as was available to the hold of the privateer.

This was completed late in the afternoon, and a little later on the schooner broke completely apart of her own weight, and was gone.

"She was my own property, so that no one is a loser, you know, but myself," was Captain Scudder's philosophical comment upon the event. "And then again, my boy, no one can deny that she was in at the death, which is a certain satisfaction in every sort of chase, from fox-hunting to pirate-smashing."

There were no more earthquake shocks, and before night set in, the victorious waves had scattered far and wide the last relics of the mountain foe which they had overborne into their mysterious depths.

On the following day the Sea Scout, greatly overcrowded by reason of the Nemesis's crew, which had been added to her own, set sail for the north, with the pirate schooner in charge of a prize-crew.

Some few more prizes were made from among the British merchant marine during the voyage, and she finally made a junction with the French fleet off Cape Henlopen, to find that much of her fame had already preceded her.

Barnacle Ben was now one of the great naval celebrities of the day.

Not only was the coveted letter-of-marque awaiting him, but he was received by the Congress at Philadelphia with many distinctions, while General Washington, who was then conducting operations with some success in New Jersey, in the next interview that the young commander had with him was impressively pronounced in his expressions of approval.

"I scarcely dared dream," said the great man of the Revolution, while pressing the youth's hand, "of the measure of success you have so nobly achieved. But I did feel that there was the true stuff of patriotism in you, and now your glory is that of the Nation."

From the honors that were heaped upon him in Philadelphia the young man hastened to Perth Amboy, whither his sweetheart and sister had preceded him, and where the Widow Harrup was overjoyed to be once more with her heroic son.

Perth Amboy was again in the hands of the Americans, and Ben was already rich with the amount of prize-money that he had been able to realize, with much more to his account.

As the end of the war still seemed uncertain, it was finally decided that his marriage with the beautiful Mercy Lord should no longer be delayed, and, the widow's consent being given, that Jack Blackwell should espouse pretty Mary Harrup on the same day.

It was on a bright morning in the August of that year of our Lord 1779 that the double wedding was celebrated, and a great wedding it was, long memorable in the traditions of the little seaport community and the adjoining country-side.

Large delegations from the crews of the Sea Scout and the worse-fated Nemesis were present; some distinguished army and navy officers lent the light of their presence to the festive occasion; both brides were superlatively lovely, both grooms beamingly happy; as many of the villagers as could crowd into the little Presbyterian church in which the ceremony took place were lookers-on; and altogether it was such a social sensation as had scarcely been witnessed in New Jersey since its first settlement.

The bride in the case of Mercy and Ben was given away with smiling dignity by Captain Archibald Scudder, ex-post-captain of the Royal Navy, who had purposely lingered in America for the grand event; while, surprising as it may seem, the like service was rendered in the case of the second couple by Uncle Joe Bumper, who, well sobered up for the occasion in a brand-new sailor's suit of navy-blue jeans and with a bright new wooden leg tipped with brass, acquitted himself with breezy independence and unruffled urbanity.

"Hemlock and beeswax!" he was heard to exclaim, when slightly mellowed in the subsequent festivities; "my nephew may have kept my light under a bushel in the cruise of the Sea Scout which has made a big gun of him before his time, but I entertain no hard feelings on that account, and blood is thicker than water to the end of the world."

Captain Scudder returned to England, and thereafter lived upon his fortune as a private gentleman, refusing all offers to re-enter the service of his country against the struggling Americans. Some thought that it was because his heart was no longer in the cause, while others ascribed his retirement to family reasons. But, be that as it may, he lived, honored and loved by those who knew him best, till the beginning of the present century, a high-minded, benignant gentleman to the last.

Directly following upon his honeymoon, Barnacle Ben, accompanied by the greater part of his former officers and crew, including his brother-in-law, Jack Blackwell, Miles Hobby, Tom Simmons and—last but by no means least, in the corporeal sense at all events—Vanderspiegel, the Dutchman, started out upon a fresh cruise in the redoubtable Sea Scout.

If less uniformly successful and brilliant than its predecessor, it nevertheless lasted to the end of the war with honor and profit to its participants.

Then both Ben and Jack settled down to farming in the vicinity of Perth Amboy, and to the domestic felicity which they had deserved so well. Old Aunt Susan duly received her freedom, but remained contentedly with her mistress to the end of her days. The descendants of both couples are numerous throughout New Jersey and elsewhere at this Centennial of our Government's firm establishment among the great nations of the world, and the brightest page of their family traditions is the one that is written over, often in letters of blood and fire, with the achievements of the Sea Scout, privateer.

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